MONEY TO BURN

REGINALD WRIGHT KAUFFMAN

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MONEY TO BURN

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An Adventure Story

BY

Reginald Wright Kauffman

CHELSEA HOUSE
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Money to Burn

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To

Charles Keene Hammitt

Dear Governor:

Like most men of affairs, you prefer your books to be after the manner of this one—that's my belief, anyway. On a train by day, or abed by night, you will read "Money to Burn" and immediately forget it—which is as it should be, for then you can profitably reread it a year hence—but I'm certain it will entertain you while you *are* reading it. If it gives you the realization of good fights on strange islands in tropic seas, if it stirs you with the sense of its hairbreadth escapes, if its mystery "keeps you guessing" and inveigles you past your proper railroad station, or runs up the house electric-light bill by holding you tight until morning, then it is the sort of book that I have planned it to be. I am betting that it will accomplish such feats, and so I am dedicating it to you.

Your affectionate

R. W. K.

Geneva, Switzerland,
Dec. 7 (O. S.), 1923.

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MONEY TO BURN

CHAPTER I

QUEER STREETS

BY night, the most silent spots in all the five boroughs of Greater New York are those places which are most crowded by day. When evening has fallen, the money market's gold-crammed cañons, lately echoing to the hoarse cries of the greedy, are deserted by all except watchmen in ambush, sedulously concealed. The warehouse district that, since morning, has resounded with the clamor of drays and the shouts of drivers, is changed to paths of druids' graveyards whose tombs are towers. The outstretched water front, from Audubon Park on the Hudson, around the Battery, and up through the East River and the Harlem to McComb's Dam Bridge—those suntime scenes of an immense activity broadcast to the world's remotest corners—become, with darkness, leagues of desert—just so much solemn stillness and so many mute miles; nor is there any

rod throughout that lonely course more lonely than the streets that bound Atlantic Basin on the Brooklyn side and look across Buttermilk Channel—now a channel of ink—to Fort Columbus and Castle William beyond it on what was once the Governor's Isle.

Few lights there, yet plenty of shadows. Scarce anybody visible, yet the sense of many lives skulking near by, which would add to civilization's security by remaining invisible and torpid forever.

When young Stone turned out of Conover Street, he seemed on the edge of a city killed by the explosion of some gigantic gas shell. After he had walked a hundred yards, he began to feel that stealthy beasts were creeping in to feed upon the dead.

"Where you goin'?"

He came up short before a deep doorway from the comparative security of which two policemen peered out at him. He could distinguish their caps and nothing more; he understood that the law's officers are safer in pairs when they keep their nocturnal vigils in such quarters.

"I'm out for a walk," said Dan.

It was a natural excursion for him. He worked hard all day over his books at the medical school, or over such public-ward patients as he was permitted to attend in the hospital; by evening he wanted fresh air, and this night he had sought it at the waterside. He had to study so intently that there was small opportunity for the cultivation of friendship, and so he walked alone. He liked the smell of tar and the neighborhood of ships as only an inlander can, and so—though this particular spot was new to him—he often explored the wharves. Nevertheless, as he gave those policemen his entirely veracious explanation, he realized that it could not sound entirely convincing to its auditors.

It wasn't.

"Let's have a look at you."

A flash lamp shot its rays from the policeman's fist to the wanderer's face.

The face of an enthusiast. Blue eyes that smiled, but that, even when smiling, could hint of zealous faiths and determined defense of them. A mouth that smiled also and smiled like the eyes. Fresh complexion—frank expression—light hair that

fought its way toward freedom under a soft hat. Impossible to suspect such a chap of evil intent here, yet equally impossible to consider such a chap safe in such a district.

"Well, this here's no place for a quiet stroll," said the policeman.

"The quiet's desavin', me boy," his companion added.

"I can take care of myself," said Stone.

The second policeman grunted. "The East River's full o' lads that thought the same. Run along uptown wid yez, or somebody'll be goin' fishin' for yez in the mornin'."

Dan made some pretense at obedience, but he soon turned back again and resumed his walk by the water. It was full of motionless ships, their masts and funnels dimly visible—ships that had come in yesterday with cargoes of furs and laces, of sugar and coffee, spices and cocoa from distant ports, ships that would sail to distant ports to-morrow with American chemicals and copper, medicines and machinery, coal and oil and hardware.

For the next fifteen minutes he met nobody.

Then, up a narrow street to his left, a door opened and closed again. There had been a faint glow and a howl. A whining dog limped toward Stone and, with that canine instinct which recognizes dog lovers at the first encounter, nestled against his already pausing feet.

Dan bent to stroke the cur. It whimpered.

"Hurt?" asked Stone.

He felt the animal. One of its forelegs was broken.

There was a corner lamp some distance forward. He lifted the dog and bore it thither. A brutal kick had probably done the damage. Dan read that in the meek eyes turned up to his. He found a bit of wood, relic of some box dropped and broken by a van, and whittling the stick and ripping his handkerchief, he improvised a splint.

The dog held quiet with understanding patience. When the operation was complete, Stone felt a damp muzzle kissing his hand.

"If that was your home," said Dan, "I think I'll take you back there. Perhaps the sight of what

they've done will make it safer for you than outside."

Carefully carrying his bundle, he made his way back to the point whence, he thought, the glow had issued. It was an apparently vacant warehouse, but Stone knocked at the smaller of its doors.

No answer.

He couldn't well take his charge home with him. His third-rate boarding house opened to much that he disapproved of, but the angular landlady set her face sternly—and it was a flint face—against dogs. She owned a cat, which was her sole comfort, and one of the hundred hardships of her lodgers. Nothing to be done in that respect. Moreover, Stone was the sort of person who, the more impulsively he has embarked upon an enterprise, the more deliberately and determinedly he persists in it.

He knocked again.

Still no answer.

Well, he was going through with this thing. If the dog had chosen to decamp, that would be another matter. There was a good deal to be said against returning him to the scene of his injury;

but there was more to be said against turning an injured cur loose to the mercies of street urchins such as must, by day, infest a neighborhood like this. Dan wished the animal would run away; the animal lay quiet in his arms, so he knocked a third time.

Now louder. And now a response.

The echoes of his knuckle blows rolled up the dark and empty street. They caromed from the black walls of one side to the black walls farther along on the other, and, as they lessened with distance, there came a shuffling step from behind that portal before which the medical student was standing—a shuffling step first; and then a whispered and hesitant, but entirely audible, voice demanded:

"Who's there?"

CHAPTER II

"CROSS-EYED" JOHNSON

A MOMENT before Stone had been wishing that the dog would decamp and relieve him of his self-imposed duty. The dog fled now, yet too late to save its preserver from the necessity of going forward.

At sound of that low voice behind the door, Dan's little patient jumped out of its physician's arms and scuttled, on three legs, but with significant speed, up the thoroughfare, where darkness instantly engulfed it. In that canine mind, any one of the street's thousand dangers was evidently preferable to another encounter with the man who had just spoken. For Stone, pursuit was obviously useless. There was no overtaking the fugitive; yet so affected was he by its determination to escape that he poised upon the edge of giving chase. He was ready to make that enterprise an excuse for his own departure when a bolt was shot back and the door opened.

No retreat now. Dan stood his ground.

At first, scarcely anything was to be seen there. A bullet-shaped head—a head like a modern elongated bullet stood on end, with wide ears flanking it, or like those conical spikes, balanced by steel wings, which airmen dropped in the later raids of the World War. What illumination was vouchsafed came from back of this man who now confronted him.

"I ast you who you was."

Stone rejoiced that the dog had escaped; anyhow, dogs knew best where their comparative safety lay. The tone of this inquisitor was thick. His breath was heavy with bad liquor.

Said Dan: "A pup ran out of here a few minutes ago. Somebody kicked it——"

The fellow in the doorway swayed. "Well, it was *my* dawg. This is a free country—or used to be. I guess I got a right to kick my own dawg, ain't I?"

"Its leg's broken," Stone explained. His anger—always quick to rise against cruelty—he did his best to put down. "I set the leg. I was bringing him back to you."

Whether protest was not entirely absent from that reply and was felt and feared by the dog owner, or whether the man really experienced some remorse at learning the extent of the injuries he had inflicted, it was difficult to say. In either event, he suffered a sudden and palpable change of heart. His tone softened.

"Leg broken? I'm sorry. Where is he?"

"As soon as he heard you coming he beat it."

The bullet-headed man hesitated: "You ain't an agent of that association for cruelty to animals?"

"I'm not."

"Well then, don't worry about that there dawg. I know him, an' he knows me. See? He knows my little ways don't mean nothin', an' he'll be back when his bread basket's empty. I *am* sort o' quick-tempered sometimes, but I get right over it. I'm much obliged to you for settin' that leg o' his. Come on in."

There was absolutely no reason in the world why such an invitation should be accepted by a hard-working, sober-living medical student whose sole ambition lay strictly within the limits of his

chosen profession and whose scarcely indulged hobby was—of all things conceivable—the study of that Spanish-American church architecture no true example of which he had ever seen. Dan knew that this neighborhood was a precarious one. He knew that he faced a man subject to a form of brutality that Stone, for his part, always found especially repellent. Nevertheless, he was that kind of young American who finds a compelling reason for any course in the very fact that there is no reason apparent.

"Thanks," he said, "I will come in for a minute. I've been walking a good way, and I'm tired."

He was curious, too. He stepped inside. The other man bolted the door.

"If you're done up," he croaked, "I can give you a drop of somethin'."

They now stood under a dreary hanging lamp. Dan could see that his host was burly, flushed, and watery eyed; the host, on the other hand, studied Stone's face and evidently found it as reassuring as the policemen had done.

"It's the real stuff," he continued with a waver-

ing smile that gave added proof, if added proof were required, of the efficacy of his own liquor. "Just got it in from Rum Row out there, an' I'm sellin' it cheaper'n any other bar in N'York."

Dan shook his tow-colored head. Only that afternoon he had been helping, in hospital, to treat the case of a longshoreman who had succumbed to wood-alcohol poisoning through use of some "real stuff." However, since Stone seemed to have stumbled upon one of the many water-front dives that cater to the thirst of wharf workers and sailors ashore, no good could come from rousing antagonism by casting suspicion on the wares thus offered; so he said only:

"No thanks. I'm off the stuff. But I don't mind taking a cigar."

The dealer led the way down a shadowy hall and into a little room that must once have been the outer office of some legitimate business concern. What had been the cashier's cage was now lengthened and, relieved of its wire mesh, made a quite practical bar with an impressively labeled array of bottles on the shelves behind it. There

were two or three tables in the room, but only one of these was occupied. At it sat three men. Two of these were engaged in a loud and muddled controversy. It was postponed at Dan's entrance, but, after a glance in his direction, its participants paid him no further compliment of attention. He took a chair near them.

"I'll get you that smoke," said the dive manager, "an' you'll find it A 1." He shuffled behind the bar.

A member of the trio at the neighboring table was asking a companion: "When do you sail?"

Stone heard the answer. "Two weeks from last Wednesday."

The barkeeper returned, bringing, not a box but a handful of cigars that were as dark as the night outside.

"Try one of these here," he said. "Real Cuban, an' never paid a cent of duty, neither. That's why I can afford to sell 'em at fifteen cents per."

A glance told Dan that there was no choice among the handful. He selected at random, and while the dive manager retreated behind the desk,

there polishing glasses with a dirty towel and occasionally filling and emptying one for his own uses, he lighted the weed.

Awful stuff. Dan coughed over it. He began to cast about for some pretense whereby, without giving offense, he might escape before this alleged tobacco choked him.

"When'd you say you sailed, Mr. Johnson?"

The customer that had inquired, a moment since, about that date of sailing had drunkenly repeated the question. Idly Dan looked again at his neighbors.

The fellow to whom the queries were addressed was of just the type that would have been expected to frequent this place. He had a broad, weather-beaten face, and a bad cast in one eye. By the way in which he wore his clothes it was clear that they were the shore clothes of a sailor; and by the awkward movement of his roughened fist as he raised his glass, it was equally clear that he had raised it quite often enough this evening.

"I told you once. We're scheduled to get away a fortnight from last Wednesday." He pronounced

the "sch" of "scheduled" as if it were "sh" only, and he spoke with a rising inflection.

Dan bit off an inch from the less dangerous end of his cigar and dropped that inch inconspicuously under his table. There was, he reflected, something queer about the questioner and about the silent man of the party. The latter seemed to be the questioner's particular friend. They somehow appeared to have made the acquaintance of the man called Johnson recently, and the acquaintance seemed to have a common taste for liquor as its foundation.

Well, that was not unusual, and the manager of this place gave no hint of sharing Stone's feelings about Johnson's table mates, though, to be sure, the manager was fonder of his stock than he ought to be, and perhaps this dulled the fine edge of that caution which is requisite to succeed in such a trade. What, anyhow, roused Dan's doubts?

Their subjects were unshaven men in suits that had seen hard usage. Both were muscular and both uncouth. They ought to belong here—and yet they didn't. They were not seafaring men; they were not longshoremen. Stone could bring to mind no

calling indigenous to this section of the city which they gave token of pursuing. They lolled in their chairs as if they had drunk as much as their cross-eyed companion, but, even as Dan was seeking to appraise them, he saw the silent fellow quietly lower his glass beneath their table edge and let quite half the contents trickle to the rusty carpet.

"Have 'nother drink," the inquisitive stranger urged his sailor guest.

Johnson laughed in a silly manner. A hiccup interrupted his laughter. "Had 'bout 'nough," he said.

"Not near. None of us have. Come on an' liquor up."

Johnson looked at the tempter out of his one good eye. It was rather glassy, but Dan saw in it, or thought he saw, a struggling mistrust. The generous person was in the act of summoning the barkeeper; he raised a beckoning hand. Across the table Johnson pulled it down.

"Don' want 'nother drop."

The man who had not spoken nudged his neigh-

bor. That one clasped Johnson's restraining fingers with a vast good fellowship.

"Say," he wheedled, "why won't you tell us what the old tub's carryin'?"

"If blue-nosed Goldthwaite heard you speak disrespectful of the *Hawk,*" said Johnson, "he'd throw you—throw you across that bar there."

"Well, anyway, what's he goin' to have aboard of her, matey?"

There was a moment's pause, during which it could be seen the sailor was making desperate endeavor to gather his wits together. Then, as if repeating a lesson learned by heart, he growled:

"Condensed milk for the West Indies. I said so before, an' I say it again."

This must be the topic over which they had been wrangling when Dan entered.

"Milk nothin'," mocked the inquisitor.

Johnson sat back in his chair. "Do you mean I'm a liar?"

The man who had hitherto been silent spoke now. He spoke hurriedly and soothingly. "Course he don't. Come on an' have li'l' drink."

"Course he *does*," Johnson stubbornly persisted. Then rage flamed. "What business of you chaps is it what we carry? Eh, what? I don't like yer. I don't like yer looks, an' I've 'alf a mind——"

He made it a whole mind then and there. He threw his empty glass in the face opposite him, leaped up, overset the table, and then jumped it with a knife raised in his right fist.

Everybody was afoot. The dive manager hurdled his bar. Stone darted forward. The cautious man called:

"Don't hurt him, Tom!"

They were all three too late. The threatened customer picked up his chair and brought it down upon Johnson's head—brought Johnson down, too, down to the floor.

"You fool!" yelled the cautious man. "You fool!"

He shot across the room and up the hall. His friend was at his heels. Before any of the three who were left behind could move to stop retreat, the outer door was unbolted. It opened; it closed. The fight had been successful.

"Prohibition-enforcement agents?" asked Stone as he bent above the supine Johnson. "After evidence?"

The violator of the eighteenth amendment mopped his low brow. "They wouldn't never have made this kind of trouble if they was," he said. "They'd have just pinched me right off."

Johnson opened his crossed eye. "Am I much hurt?"

A quick examination brought Dan's negative verdict. "But you're slated for a few days in hospital," he said.

"I don't mind that." Johnson gave a glare at the doorway through which his recent enemies had made good their escape. "I only wish I'd got my knife into one of 'em. They didn't learn anything from me, eh?" That opened eye almost disappeared under the bridge of his nose. "Well, my lad, don't you go a-thinkin' things. The reason they *didn't* get anything out o' me was because there ain't nothin' to *be* got—that's why!"

CHAPTER III

DEADLY WEAPONS

AFTER squeamish days of infernal weather, the British tramp steamer *Hawk*—nine hundred tons, Captain Goldthwaite, New York to West Indian ports—limped across an unruffled sea, blue and transparent. There, where the waters of the Atlantic and the Caribbean meet, morning had dawned like the unfolding of a pale-pink rose. Far away off the old tub's starboard quarter, a silver-gray blot against the glittering azure of the sky increased in size; gradually it seemed to descend to the world's rim until it detached itself from the heavens: Mount Diablo of Santo Domingo.

The *Hawk* groaned at sight of it like a man with sore corns, but the cranky screw continued, however unsteadily, its revolutions. The heat was intense and the direct summer sun cast a shadowless glare over peeling stack, suspicious deck, paint-hungry sides. A sinister craft; as regiments contract the

temperament of their colonels, so do merchant vessels assume a likeness to their commanders—sullen, ominous, a discord in that marine symphony, Captain Goldthwaite's ocean peddler advertised its master's character to air and wave.

Below, in the cabin forward, Dan Stone's straight blue eyes grew bluer. His open smile widened.

"Oh, she's a rum ship, all right," he grinned.

The Greek philosopher who advised us to know ourselves counseled the impossible. The briefest experience suffices for a practical understanding of nature. A kitten need fall only once into the water and be rescued; it will dread drowning ever thereafter. A baby needs few tumbles before he realizes that heights are best avoided. Yet, though the wasp born yesterday can to-day design and build its intricate nest, the longest life and the hardest study are not long enough or hard enough to furnish man with self-comprehension. He may acquire all the lore of the scholar, all the arts of business, but he will never thoroughly read his own mind and his own heart. He will tell his child that the attraction of gravity draws the loosened apple to

the ground, but he can master nothing except the broadest principles of that inevitable law of cause and effect as it determines his own history. A Sicilian slave throws away his worn-out sandal and thereby becomes a Roman general. Proceeding leisurely to his office, a rich New York broker pauses to buy a cravat that has attracted him from a haberdasher's window, and so starts in motion a train of events that, five years later, makes him a pauper. Dan Stone set the broken leg of a dog in Brooklyn; that act sent him southward aboard the *Hawk*.

"That's what she is," he repeated, "a rum ship."

He had, in his capacity of acting ship's doctor, just concluded the professional portion of his call on the tramp's only passenger. Seen by daylight, or by so much of it as the cabin permitted to enter, Stone presented a picture of the physically well-proportioned man; but so nicely balanced were his muscles that no gaze save a trained one would have marked him out for owning the unusual strength—the quick movement and long endurance—which he really possessed.

Anybody not both anatomist and psychologist must have been preoccupied with his impetuous face, his frank glance that was too ready to accept the rest of the world on its own terms, and his boyishly unruly hair, tow colored and irreconcilably rebellions to the brushes; and anybody with a knowledge of the *Hawk's* captain would have wondered how Stone came to be his medico and how long he could stand that tyrant's gaff.

From his bunk, the passenger echoed his physician's last word. "Rum?" He nearly pulled himself to a sitting posture. "Is *that* what she is?"

The *Hawk* was no floating fortress of free speech. Though few of the hands on that British boat understood the English tongue, Stone glanced beyond the cabin door to make sure that he wasn't overheard. Then he glanced back at his mysterious patient.

"I don't mean liquor, Mr. Hoagland. Her liquor's milk, all right, condensed milk, to be dropped here, there, and everywhere till we dump the last at Port of Spain; only I bet it's curdled by now. I just meant she was—well, what Captain Gold-

thwaite or any of his fellow countrymen would mean when they used the word that I used in the way I used it. She's *rum.*"

This patient was the only other American aboard, and if Stone's presence furnished him with material for speculation, he was a puzzle to Stone. The acting doctor rarely indulged the vice of personal questions, but he found it hard to understand why so well-groomed a man—well groomed even in his illness—should have chosen this manifestly disreputable tramp when, as a hundred signs gave testimony to even this fresh-water physician, he was accustomed to ocean liners. However, the urbane Mr. Hoagland had kept largely to himself, and until stricken with ptomaine poisoning, mostly confined his conversation to the tempestuous captain and the latter's malicious mate.

The *Hawk,* if she had made much more bad weather, would have been in real danger of foundering. During the storm which had swooped down upon them within an hour of their dropping Sandy Hook—which had, indeed, only yesterday subsided—she shipped veritable seas that seemed

to push her completely beneath the surface of the ocean and hold her there until, miraculously, she wriggled back to life.

Though possibly ignorant of her captain's temper, Hoagland, who must have had some choice of boat, should have gleaned from the most cursory observation a general idea of the *Hawk's* sea qualities before ever he came aboard of her. Larger, more comfortable, and far swifter boats touched at all the ports at which the *Hawk* called, though their sailings might be fairly infrequent. It seemed to the doctor that Hoagland's haste must, therefore, have been to leave America rather than to arrive at his destination. Did he have to hurry from his country for his country's good?

"You're some doctor!" said he now; he was a wiry little man with thin hair and a snub nose. His eyes, of a gray that generally veiled their alertness by staring into vacancy, now turned with frank questioning directly on the figure in the doorway. "Why d'you pick a tub like this?"

It was exactly the query that Dan Stone, M. D.-minus, would have liked to put to Hoagland. How-

ever, he answered it easily enough. "Because I'm not really a doctor yet."

"No diploma?"

"Third year and working my way through. First summer I was a second-rate hotel clerk at a third-rate seaside resort. Last year I was a hospital orderly. Two weeks ago the mate of this boat got in a scrap, and I happened along when he needed some first aid. The *Hawk* wanted a doctor and asked no questions; I wanted a job and didn't ask any, either. So here I am."

It was his way to make light of his own hardships. He honestly laughed at them now. He didn't like to talk about himself, and so he neglected to add that, nursing a dream about some day setting up practice in these latitudes, he wanted to better his already nearly perfect knowledge of Spanish, and that he wanted, also, to see something of West Indian ecclesiastical architecture.

"Well," persisted his patient, "but why do you call it a rum ship?"

Dan laughed again. He thought of the *Hawk's* rats, which scuttled over him when he tried to

sleep. He was bunking with a crew that had no notion of personal cleanliness; even now he could smell the stench of their quarters; they never volunteered to police the place; its deck was a mass of filth, swabbed only when his threats of violence moved his messmates to sullen effort. But he laughed, because he had found that the easiest way of supporting tyranny, and all he said was:

"*You* wouldn't call it a champagne one, would you?"

Rum it was, because rum furnished its commander with the chiefest of his preoccupations. Congressmen from the farm and senators that have never gone deeper than the *Leviathan's* dining room have devised some well-intentioned laws for sailor folk; so has his Britannic majesty's Parliament; but when a ship's master is far at sea and his boat returns only once in five years to its home port, that master may become a master indeed. If he is a bully born, with a hatred of humanity because he can abuse it, and if he overstokes his temper with the fuel of alcohol, his ship will be as much a floating hell as ever was any slaver's in the Middle

Passage; and Captain Goldthwaite was exactly the sort of devil to meet all these requirements and enjoy them.

For Stone, things had begun to go wrong when the Goddess of Liberty stolidly watched the *Hawk* pass her pedestal. The bull-necked, blue-nosed captain had coveted the liberal graft to be acquired by surrendering his cabin to the unexpected and eleventh-hour passenger; but once his cabin was surrendered, he fell into an abiding rage because he had to occupy the mate's instead. Cross-eyed Johnson, the mate, cursed at having to bunk with the engineer, whom he hated, and Dan, who had been promised a couch in the engineer's quarters, was contemptuously housed with the doubtful West Indian crew.

Being there, he was promptly treated as belonging. Almost the first warmth, when she nosed her way into the Gulf Stream, proved too much for the *Hawk's* so-called cold-storage locker. The beef went bad and half the ship's company with it. Hoagland, the solitary passenger, fell a victim. Dan saved himself by subsisting on pilot biscuit and cof-

fee, yet that he saved the others was not charged to his credit. Captain Goldthwaite's habit was to regard as less than human any being that lived forward; twice already he had raised his drunken but powerful hands against the doctor.

"It's my own fault," Dan reflected; "I ought to have known better. I *did.* I knew Johnson was a brute the minute I saw him, and he as good as told me what his captain was. I've only myself to blame for ever shipping on this boat; but I won't take any man's fist and not come back at him. The day that Goldthwaite touches me," Stone quietly vowed, "I'll first knock him down and then leave the ship if I have to swim till I go under."

Now Hoagland, with a wry smile that drew his thin face into deep wrinkles, was answering Dan's latest question with another:

"No, I wouldn't call it a champagne ship, but I might say it was a milk punch. What do you make of the captain?"

Was the misplaced passenger asking all this because he really wanted to learn more of the *Hawk,* or because he wanted to ferret out something about

Stone? It was all too pointed to be the mere making of conversation. Dan had nothing to conceal, and therefore retained his natural reticence.

"I haven't seen enough of him to think anything worth repeating," he said. He bade his patient a quick good-by and went on deck.

The tramp had entered a bay and was skirting shores where luxuriant vegetation rose abruptly from the water's edge and climbed mountain high behind. Tangles of greenery grew steep as a medieval city's walls, from the sea grape to the banana fan, and so to strange varieties of palm. At the far head of the landlocked sea, a little town, all gleaming white and hot, peeped from its verdant frame.

Dan accosted a passing member of the crew. "What's this?" he asked.

"Sanchez, Señor Medico."

The sailor pointed also to San Lorenzo, close off their port bow. He indicated, well to starboard, Santa Barbara de Samaná.

The profession of medicine and the study of church architecture do not entail a thorough knowl-

edge of geography. Dan had understood that the city of Santo Domingo was to be their first call, and he now assumed that all this lay in their course thither. For the rest, it was enough for him that the way was beautiful and that he was passing over waters that Columbus sailed when he had his first glimpse of the New World.

Bells rang out orders from above. The throb of rickety machinery suddenly stopped and gave the tired ship an instant's rest.

There came a cry from alongside and answering shouts from the bridge. A face appeared over the rail—wide nose and thick lips, yet skin of purest copper, and straight black hair. The body that followed was clad in a dirty uniform bedecked with much gold lace; one foot wore a patent-leather dancing pump, the other a canvas tennis shoe. The negro Indian pilot climbed to the wheelhouse. A moment later, bulking Captain Goldthwaite passed Stone without so much as a nod, on his way below.

The *Hawk's* progress was anything but rapid. Dan waited until the swift tropical night descended

and the yellow stars drooped close above the funnel. The land turned to lilac, and little lights began to appear on shore.

Then cross-eyed Johnson hurried up to the American.

Notwithstanding Dan's ministrations in the speakeasy and at the hospital, the mate had never pretended friendliness. Perhaps he realized the unexpressed but low opinion in which he was held; certainly, he had proffered the post of ship's doctor, not out of gratitude of Stone, but because Stone's casually announced desire for such a position provided an opportunity to do Goldthwaite a good turn by getting him a medical officer at a low figure.

"Where've you been?" The mate spoke always the broad tongue of Avonmouth, and now he spoke with an even more than usual brusqueness.

"Here," said Dan imperturbably.

"Been a-lukin' everywheres fur you."

"I've been in full view all the time."

"Well, you're wanted."

"Where?"

"In my cabin." Johnson leered. "And," he added, "I'd advise you 'urry, my lad!"

Stone left him and went where ordered. His heart was hot. He wanted to practice obedience; but he was nearing the limits of his endurance. Until this afternoon, he had had small time for reflection, but to-day's respite, with the land so close, and the prospect of weeks of browbeating ahead, had determined him on a definite course of action that began with his recorded vow to meet possible force by certain retaliation.

There was a small table in the mate's stifling quarters. Here, under a smoking lamp, sprawled Captain Goldthwaite. His huge bulk slumped forward; his lurching elbows, supported by the table top, swelled the muscles of his arms until, over them, the coat sleeves strained tight. His monstrous shoulders were hunched to his hairy ears. A lowering, bestial face—his brows were knitted over a large book and over his repugnance for anything so contemptible as the printed page. His blue nose was a dark splash between his crimson cheeks; from his thick lips, curling scornfully, his

breath issued with a sibilant sound and, in this airless cubby-hole, hung as heavily as that dive keeper's in the Brooklyn grog shop. Goldthwaite's breath was rank with Barbados rum.

"You sent for me?" asked Dan, and then he recognized the book and flushed.

"Yes."

Goldthwaite growled the monosyllable. He had always detested the doctor, because the doctor would show no fear of him. Not able to wreak resentment on the passenger who had deprived him—at a good price—of his quarters, the captain fastened it on the sole compatriot of that passenger aboard. Now a drunken cunning had come to the aid of enmity and pointed a way to revenge—and to profit as well. The drunkard transfixed his auditor with a concentrated glare.

Dan did not so much as blink. He was resolved to make this fellow state his grievance. The captain, on the other hand, was equally resolved to stare the medical student into startled speech, and then to take offense at it. Dan's temper was longer than Goldthwaite's, and Dan won.

"I sent for you a half hour ago!" the captain suddenly roared. "Where have you been hiding yourself?"

"I have been on deck all afternoon."

"On deck! Why haven't you been attending to your job?"

"I haven't any patients left except the passenger, and he won't need me till eight bells, if even then."

"None of your lip! I've found out you're no doctor—and I'll have no damned lip from you!"

Goldthwaite's hairy right fist pounded the volume lying open on his table, and at that Dan winced. He had to speak decisively after all, but he kept as much anger from his voice as he could manage:

"I don't mean to be impudent, sir, but at the same time I want proper treatment in return."

Had the captain been sober, his reply would have been a blow. He was, of course, far from sober, and so there was no honesty in his rage. It was the slow rage that traps. He leaned back in his chair with an ugly grin and a choked oath.

"Go on," said he.

Johnson had entered the cabin. With a twist of his crossed eye, he grunted an echo to his master's order.

"I never pretended to be a graduate physician," Dan quietly continued; "but I was shipped as doctor and I've been treated like a deck hand. Graduate or not, I've saved half your crew for you, and all I've got in return is curses—almost blows. Our agreement hasn't once been kept—on your part or Johnson's."

"So *that's* it?" sneered the captain. "Well, what do you want?"

The mate grunted again. Dan cleared his throat; he spoke with firmness. "I'm going to have my pay to date and leave this ship at Santo Domingo City."

Whether or not that statement was expected, he never knew. It served, in any case, as the opening for an attack, which was what Goldthwaite wanted.

"Leave the ship?" The captain sprang up with such violence that even Johnson drew aside. "Desert, will you? You signed for the voyage, and

I'll have you in irons in five minutes!" He leaned across the table and shook a fist under Dan's nose.

"If you do that," began Stone, "I'll——"

"Law?" screamed the captain before any mention could be made of courts. "Don't you talk to me about law! You signed as a doctor and you ain't one. What'll the law say to that? A doctor!" He thumped the volume again, and his descending paw tore loose one of its treasured pages. "Johnson found this book in your duffel bag, didn't you, Johnson? And what's it about? Medicine? No! It's all about how they built churches. Now then, young fellow, you go to jail ashore for a faker—breaking the regulations governing ships' doctors—or else you stay aboard of us without pay!"

The guile of this tyrant was unworthy of its name. His flagrant scheme was to punish Dan and at the same time divert to his own pocket the medico's wages. Goldthwaite's right hand went up again. Its open palm, thrust over the table, caught Stone across the face.

Dan staggered back. When, in an instant, sight returned, he saw the captain in the act of wrenching the cover from the book.

There are not extant a dozen samples of the 1620 edition of Amades Lizarrago's monumental work on "The Cathedrals and Churches of New Spain," and this copy was one of them. It was priceless in the old-book market, but, poor as he was, Dan Stone would never have sold his copy. Along with a useless passion for the lesser phases of ecclesiastical architecture and a hundred or two other old volumes, that book formed the only legacy left him by the father he had loved.

The captain's last act was too much for Dan. He vaulted the table.

Goldthwaite sprang back until the cabin wall stopped him. He whipped out a pistol and fired. One of Stone's fists knocked up the weapon not an instant too soon; the other drove itself into the captain's raging face.

Almost at once the thing had happened. Johnson stood motionless, so amazed at this marvel of resistance as to be unable to help his superior officer.

Goldthwaite, on his part, was too dissipated a bully to stand punishment. His eyes started from their sockets. As if a painter's brush swept over them, his cheeks turned purple; his mouth screwed upward on one side, like the mouth of a man in a fit, and he pitched over and fell his full length on the floor.

"You've murdered him! You'll swing for this! My God, you'll swing for it!"

Cross-eyed Johnson came to life with his declaration of Goldthwaite's leaving it. He sprang between Dan and the doorway.

Stone gave one look at the captain's form. It was horribly still. He wheeled and with one sweep of his arm drove the mate aside. A steep flight of stairs ascended directly from the corridor. Dan plunged up them.

He heard the cross-eyed man yell, heard the pounding of the mate's feet in gaining pursuit, but he reached the deck.

There were sailors about. They looked up at the noise of his approach.

"Stop him!" shrieked Johnson.

Dan ran to the rail. He climbed it. He poised there one instant only. Then he flung his hands together above his head and dived over the side, through the darkness, toward the invisible sea.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEACH COMBER

STONE was a good swimmer. On this night of his plunge from the *Hawk,* he needed all his strength and all his art.

It was with the speed of a St. Moritz toboggan that he struck the water a few yards beyond the ship's side. Down he went among the cool recesses —and still down. His ears roared, his chest collapsed, yet there kept ringing in his consciousness those words which spurred his every muscle to escape:

"You'll swing for this! By God, you'll swing for it!"

Still down!

He remembered having heard that, somewhere off Porto Rico, Mount Everest itself could be all but submerged. He seemed to be plumbing a scarcely minor abyss. Nevertheless, there is a level at which sea water refuses the unprotected body of a hu-

man diver. He reached that at last, and from it was catapulted upward.

Lights overhead—stars. Lights directly in front of him—a town. He struck out for it.

Blue parrot fish swam with him; he could not see them. Striped "sergeant majors" fled his approach. A cub shark followed him—and then turned tail.

It turned tail because Dan found himself among breakers. He fought. He was tossed high. He believed he was lost, but the tide was with him, and the underpull light. One great wave flung him landward; he lowered his feet. Waist deep in the water, he stood on comfortingly firm sands.

He was penniless; the threat of the disgraceful gallows, or of an almost equally disgraceful prison term for manslaughter overpowered him. The chances of capture were a hundred to one, and if he went free for the present, he might never show himself in his chosen profession. To do so would be to court attention. He thought of that even now. The career he had struggled so hard to make possible must be abandoned. As for any immediate

course, he dared not enter the town, and yet he was too near exhaustion to go beyond it.

He staggered down the damp darkness of the beach. Here, though the sky was illumined overhead, the night was impenetrable. His right foot struck something that moved with a groan; he bounded aside, and his left kicked a body that swore cordially. The sands were full of derelict men, seeking sleep. With a resignation that made him one of them, Dan sank down, at last more desirous of rest than of escape.

The town's water-front street was not a hundred yards away, and under its rare lamps he could see barefoot citizens parading with umbrellas raised against the supposedly evil effects of starshine. The heat of the day was gone, the air was chilly, and he was wet through. He burrowed into the sand.

"Look out there! Don't crowd."

Dan gasped an apology to the invisible neighbor whom he had discommoded.

The fellow was evidently an American. "There's plenty of room on San Lorenzo sands," he grumbled.

San Lorenzo! Dan had assumed that, during his

interview in the cabin, the *Hawk* had progressed toward her announced destination:

"This isn't Santo Domingo?"

The voice of his fellow beach comber cackled a feeble laugh: "What sort o' rum do *you* drink? Course it's Santo Domingo, but San Domingo City's clear across the island, an' if you've just come to Española, why, take it from me, you've come to the nearest thing to hell this side of the *real* place."

He dropped into a low monologue of anathemas. This was a land of fever and sudden death; the towns were barbarous, the jungle savage. In the interior, human sacrifices established the reign of the worshiped snake; San Lorenzo's saloons were outnumbered by the *hounforts* of sorcerers. Neither Dan's silence nor the livid objections of other sleepy loafers discouraged the diatribe.

"If you don't take your hat off and say 'Good day' before you ask a nigger for a job, he'll tell you he'll cut your heart out and drink your blood; and if you turn your back, he'll make good, too. And don't you get sick here. If you do, they'll call in a witch doctor. I had the jimjams last week.

They took me to the municipal hospital. The cots are dirty mattresses on the floor, and the chickens walk over you. All they do for you's give you one mess o' red beans and then let you die."

He rumbled on. The oaths of the surrounding company ended in discouragement. Even Dan ceased to listen.

Where was the pursuit? And what, if it failed, was he to do?

It was barely conceivable that Johnson counted him drowned; but even if he was not sought, his plight was desperate. Small opportunity for a medical student in this isle of witchcraft—and for a medical student who, if recognized, would be arrested as a murderer. Ecclesiastical architecture? Dan smiled grimly at the darkness. In the little town where he had been brought up, that Pennsylvania-Dutch lawyer who administered the elder Stone's estate—comprising, as he thought, nothing save valueless books—had cautioned the heir:

"Your pop was the kindest-hearted man as effer lived, but he hadn't an eye for money yet. If you want to git along, boy, keep your eyes off'n print."

And now, because of a printed book, Dan had incurred a capital charge! Despair propped wide his eyelids.

He thought of his father, and his father's high sense of honor—his father, who had had such hopes for his boy, such faith in his son's future, his father who, though not himself successful in any worldly way, had given so much more than the worldly to young Dan. He could have wished that that book had never been given!

Dawn came at last, or rather full morning. Would capture accompany it?

One minute, the waters were dark as midnight; the next, and with the smell of seaweed at low tide, the silver gulls and "longtails" in silver spray flew above a sea of dancing gold. Dan's neighbors sat up, stretching and scratching, in every concluding stage of rascally vagabondage, negroes from Haiti and Martinique, Frenchmen from Marseilles, outcast Britons dismissed by the Bahamas, Spanish, Portuguese, Italians, Levantines, and the New York wharf rat who had cursed Santo Domingo—the sweepings of fifty ports from Glasgow and Varna

to Demerara and the Chagres. Over on the water-front street gaudily dressed mulatto women appeared, hands on swaying hips, baskets of green and yellow mangoes balanced on their turbaned heads.

Through these a tall, fat man in spotless white pushed his easy way. He led by the arm a shy and graceful girl, and walked with magnificent unconcern straight among the riffraff of the beach.

In those surroundings the mere physical cleanliness of the newcomers shone like ice. The man's broad Panama was the largest Dan had ever seen. It surmounted a wide, dark face with eyes distinctly Latin, very bright and quick. Full lips smiled urbanely under a sweeping mustache, when not hidden by a plump hand, the nails of which strong teeth bit now and then, as by some habit acquired in childhood and never overcome. To the wrist of this hand a leather thong secured a Malacca cane, and, when the fingers were not at the mouth, the stick was swung with utter carelessness of its frequent descent upon the backs of beach combers scuttling like beetles before it.

Dan had lounged away. He addressed a fellow

who might hail from Caracas: *"Quién está el rico señor?"*

The South American shrugged. He didn't know who the rich gentleman might be. Besides, what difference could it make? The rich were rich because they hung on to their money, not because they peppered the sands with *dominicanos!*

"It were better to inquire about the woman," the derelict concluded with a look in reply to which Dan's kick sent him sprawling.

The girl was a picture of dusky loveliness, pure, and pure Spanish. She slightly turned her ankle in the sands and the lace covering fell from her head and frightened face—a face that one would say was merely peeping in at life's door and not liking what it saw there well enough to enter. Her glance met Dan's; she blushed and hurriedly replaced the mantilla.

An opening tea rose blown upon an ash heap. Stone felt the dust upon him; he turned aside.

As he did so his eyes swept the bay. San Lorenzo boasted no docks; the men of ships must come ashore in boats. Well, there was the *Hawk*

and a longboat putting off from her! The medical student wheeled again and found himself closely face to face with the man in white.

"Can you give me a job?"

The startled question rose to his tongue at the thought that here might be a planter from the interior about to return thither, and it proved well grounded. It came instinctively in English, but in English the large man at once smilingly replied:

"This is a strange question, and you do not look as if you belonged"—the speaker smiled down at the denizens of the foreshore—"as if you belonged here. What sort of work do you want?"

Out of the corner of an eye Dan studied the harbor. He saw the *Hawk's* boat hurrying to shore like a water spider.

"Any kind," said he.

The Panama shook a soft negative. "Any kind is no kind. I fear——"

"I can do 'most all sorts of unskilled labor." Stone extended a detaining hand. "I'm a third-year medical student, but——"

He stopped short. He could have bitten out his

tongue. Medical student! If he was to be sought by the police, that would be one of the first terms used to describe him. It should therefore be the last for him to employ, and yet it was this very word of betrayal that caught the big man's attention. At mention of medicine his smile passed. He was all interest.

"A doctor?"

The error had been made now. Dan might as well tell a part of the truth. "Not quite," said he.

"But almost? Yes? Why, then, perhaps—listen, señor. On my sugar plantation the one man invaluable who truly understands the machinery is too ill to move. I am but now arrived, waiting that a doctor's office should open, but despairing that a medico should leave his practice for me. If you could prove yourself what you say, it would be worth to me anything—anything." The bright black eyes appraised the American rapidly. "It would be worth to me one thousand dollars monthly. Besides, these two San Lorenzo doctors of course speak Spanish. I prefer a foreigner. There has been

talk of peonage—groundless, most assuredly, but still—you do not know Spanish?"

The tone of the question plainly asked for a negative answer. Two hundred yards away, the boat was landing.

"No," said Dan desperately.

"Ah, then if you could prove that you have sufficient knowledge of medicine—you have papers that no doubt will substantiate——"

The young American ran his hands through his unruly hair. He spoke so fast that his words fell over one another's heels.

"Señor," said he, "I can't. I've no papers. But didn't I tell you I was a third-year student—tell you before I could guess what you wanted? Only get me away from here—get me away from here quick!" He saw Johnson stepping ashore. Evidently a hurried and fruitless search of the previous night was now to be renewed by day. It must be made fruitless to the end! "I was ship's doctor on that tramp out there. I killed a man in a fight. I give you my word it was an accident, but it looked bad, and they're after me." He put the

stranger directly between him and the search party. He appealed to the girl: "Señorita, you——"

The girl was watching him with wide-eyed fascination, but, at his appeal to her, she seemed to draw back, and her hand made a gesture as if of dissent.

The planter interrupted quickly: "My niece does not speak English. Nevertheless, you did indeed call yourself a medical student before I had spoken of a physician.' He looked over his shoulder and observed and understood the hustle at the boat. "Walk slowly," he concluded, "but ahead of us and in this direction, opposite to your pursuers. I think that I may be persuaded to engage your professional services."

CHAPTER V

A SHADOW AT A DOOR

FROM San Lorenzo's water front, Dan paced slowly inland, the broad man in white shielding his retreat, one hand agrip of the veiled girl beside him. They skirted half the town.

"To the right now!"

His smiling dark face bent forward and over the shorter Dan. He popped a cigar into the American's wonderingly opened mouth and plumped his flamboyant Panama on the American's head, which was two sizes too small for it.

"So!" he said in a rich tone of self-congratulation at his foresight. "You must not attract too much attention, but *I* may be a gentleman taking hatless the early air."

They turned into a street lined by tamarind trees. Barefoot mulattoes made way for them with the inherent courtesy that the Domingan always ex-

hibits on a thoroughfare. In the middle distance two soldiers in ragged blue lounged toward them.

"Stop!"

The stranger paused before a providential public surrey, drawn by two humble horses. The negro driver glowed and saluted with his whip. Then he looked inquiry.

"To Sanchez," Stone's protector directed the jehu, "and double pay for double speed once we've turned the corner of the Corniche." He lifted the girl into the front seat and overshadowed Dan in the rear. "To the coffeehouse of José Logronó in the Street of the Pink Turtledoves. And thereafter—forget!"

The driver appeared used to such instructions. Without parley, he lashed his beasts, and Dan sank against the moth-eaten cushions, too weak and too grateful to be inquisitive.

He saw the town recede on either hand. They turned, beyond it, into the shore road, between the open water and a natural hedge of prickly pear and red cedar. The horses were lashed to a gallop, the crazy surrey canopy swayed like a boat

in a land swell. Dan saw the girl tossed this way and that; she did not cry out, but she clutched the seat back with delicate fingers, the knuckles straining through their satin skin.

"The lady——" he began. He had turned to find his benefactor's brilliant eyes steadily contemplating him.

"She will not be hurt. My niece understands our Domingan conveyances, as she understands other matters Domingan. Speak rather of yourself. I wish to hear more of your medical education."

He used the calm of one accustomed to obedience. Talk of any sort was more of a physical feat than an intellectual amusement in that rattling carriage, and Dan was never a man to consider himself an interesting topic. Nevertheless, the stranger's questions were pointed, and Stone managed to answer them. That his replies were satisfactory was evidenced by the inquisitor's frequent nods of approval, and the long cross-examination was still in progress when they entered what Dan concluded must be the city of Sanchez.

"Slower here!" the big man ordered.

Speed would now have been, indeed, impossible. The streets were narrow and crooked; they were ill paved and full of rotting refuse and of a human rabble equally decayed. Gray palaces of the early sixteenth century were elbowed by modern huts in staring yellow or impertinent pink. On the ruined wall of a stately dwelling that must once have housed some Spanish hidalgo there blazed the green-and-red poster of a music hall. Gambling hells and low saloons pressed upon squalid shops; haphazard electric wires drooped dangerously from fragile poles bending under the weight of lolling loafers.

"Here," said the planter with the manner of an apologetic host, "you see the worst of the *República Dominicana.* It is the mixture of blood that affects this." He drew himself up until his head nearly touched the carriage top. "I, for my part, am pure Castilian."

Whether from a lurch of the surrey or interest in her uncle's tone, Dan saw that the head of the girl turned slightly and, against the farther edge of the black mantilla, he caught a glimpse of

her pale, cameolike profile. His new employer must also have noted the shift in her position. He added hastily:

"Oh, all of our family, to be sure, are of the Spanish blood only! My sainted wife—God rest her soul!—and her deceased brother—the saints preserve him!—who was my dear niece's father, their ancestors were among the first to come to this island from old Spain and establish the plantation to which we now go."

For any evidence in her expression, his niece might not have heard him. Dan was watching it when he recalled that her uncle had said that she did not understand English. Besides, as Villeta finished his brief genealogical statement, she again faced the horses.

They were passing the neglected remains of a once splendid church. Dan's glance caressed it; his theoretical knowledge could date it almost to the day of its consecration. But his guide had evidently concluded that the time was come to repay some of Stone's personal information in kind.

"My name," said he in his silken voice, "is

Ramon Diego Villeta y Cortez. Unlike most persons of my caste in this country, I raise some herds of cattle, but as I intimated to you, señor, I possess a large sugar plantation." Again there was a movement from the seat forward, but this time the planter plainly ignored it. "To that has come an order very big and very pressing. Well then, at such a moment, my only engineer—he is taken ill. He has spasms—convulsions. He says that he has suffered thus before. He says that it is what you doctors call uræmic poisoning. Is this"—Don Ramon smiled ingratiatingly—"is this urgent?"

Dan tore his eyes from the church. "Urgent? If he diagnoses his own case correctly, it's all that and then some."

Villeta explained symptoms.

"He may be cured at once," said Dan, "or he may be dead before we arrive."

The Domingan shrugged. "It is far into the interior that we must go."

They were drawing toward the squalid outskirts of Sanchez. Don Ramon waved the driver to a

series of inconspicuous streets and bade him reduce the pace and proceed more slowly still.

"You observe," he pursued to his guest, "that I take you on faith. I have told my name. What is yours?"

"Dan Stone." The American gulped as he pronounced it. "Daniel Gurney Stone."

"On the ship where you met with your little—let us say 'accident'"—Villeta's broad shoulders shook the matter casually away—"you had signed in that complete manner?"

"No. Simply D. G. Stone."

"I see. Well, now, a silly law makes it imperative that we register at the coffeehouse because we shall be delayed there for a couple of hours. I suggest to you, señor, that it might be the part of wisdom to forget the surname—temporarily. That would in no way be using a false name if the authorities should by the merest chance inquire—just forgetfulness. My advice is that you call yourself Daniel Gurney."

Dan said nothing. He did not like subterfuge, but he cared still less for the gallows or the jail.

He would call himself anything the planter suggested—he had called himself a fool throughout the past night—and yet, though Villeta seemed the soul of frankness, Stone had some feeling of mistrust for him. The planter was plausible, but too ready to accept a runaway. However, here and now was no place or time for self-communion of such sort, for hesitation of any sort whatever.

"Very good, sir," said Dan.

They were climbing the narrowest and foulest of all the streets thus far encountered. The horses slipped on the slops, and the girl on the front seat pressed a lace handkerchief to her nose. Behind the red jalousies of doorways was the glimpse of already tired inhabitants; dark children reached up brown hands for coppers. Don Ramon shooed them off with his jeweled fingers like so many flies.

"The tropics," he smiled at Dan, "do not make for American hustle. Except for the engineer, my workmen are all natives. They also are tired—like this. They mean no harm, but the siesta is consolatory. So, when they feel like taking it,

they have the slightly awkward habit of suspending labor by throwing a stone into the machinery. That is why Tucker's health is so important to me. Ah," he exclaimed as the carriage stopped before a grimy-white building that was just sleepily opening for the day, "here is our present destination!"

He paid the driver—whose exultant *"Gracias!"* bore instant testimony to the size of the reward—and, again leading the veiled girl, pushed Dan before him into a small, dark compartment set with tables and high-backed benches. From among these, an aproned host-waiter appeared and bowed low in patent recognition.

"José," said Don Ramon, "your parlor, at once!" He clapped his fat hands. "I shall have to leave this American señor there for a short time, and you will send coffee to him; coffee, two eggs *à la coq,* some of your wife's delicious rolls, butter, honey—yes, and a bit of fresh fish if you have it. He is very hungry."

There was something superbly authoritative about the Domingan, something that, with radiant gesture, swept aside all the superfluous. He did not appear

to miss the smallest details, even in ordering a breakfast, but it was plain that his was the sort of mind that prefers to deal in large things in a large way. Don Ramon looked to Dan, even in this moment when reflection were absurd, like the magnificent real-estate operator or contractor who, scorning the mere building of one house, erects, on an empty hillside, an entire suburb of a great city.

The American was indeed very hungry, and he was glad when the trio of them were obsequiously bowed to a moldy living room on the floor above. The girl, at last released by Don Ramon, seated herself in the darkest corner, her mantilla still concealing her face. Dan, at his employer's order, forced his mind strictly to business and wrote out prescriptions for such medicines as he thought might be needed by his distant patient.

Don Ramon watched him, biting his nails the while. When the orders were completed:

"I shall borrow your hat," said he jovially, "and proceed on these errands." He retook his Panama with a flourish. "I shall buy you another head

covering, Doctor Gurney—oh, do not shudder at the appellation!—and I shall procure you an alpaca coat that will more or less fit. Rest here until I come back. You are best not observed—is it not so?"

Was the question put out of pure kindness, or could there be just the hint of a warning in it vaguely connected with Don Ramon himself? Dan wondered. He was beginning to wonder about a good many things.

Involuntarily his eyes turned toward the shadowy figure of the girl. He recalled in time that he had said he did not know Spanish.

"If only the señorita spoke English," he said, "the time would pass all too rapidly in the company of your very charming niece."

He may have spoken with too obvious gallantry. At any rate, Don Ramon's hand went to his mustached mouth, and the planter frowned uneasily:

"The Señorita Gertruda requires a constitutional," said he. "She will of course accompany me."

He bowed low to his niece. She rose slowly and took his proffered arm. Her manner might well be slightly bewildered, but it was oddly obedient to

her uncle. The planter, however, was all smiles. He led the girl from the room, humming blithely an old Domingan song:

"My mistress is a lady—a lady—his lady;
She smiles, her lord not looking, and throws a rose to me——"

Well, he couldn't mean his niece by that! Dan tried to forget her, but over the edge of the departing mantilla, a pair of sloe-black eyes had given him a glance that was almost an appeal and yet at the same time rebuff. He walked toward the window and looked down through the half open shutter, held wide at its base by a stick to let in the morning air before the sun should rise so high as to demand its barricade.

Don Ramon was still audibly humming as he passed up the street with the girl on his arm, but the words of his song could no longer be distinguished. The Señorita Gertruda seemed in no hurry. Clearly the girl was unhappy about something. There were few other pedestrians in view, yet as the pair below proceeded, Dan sud-

denly saw a shadow detach itself from a doorway opposite the coffee house of the Street of the Pink Turtledoves and cautiously follow the Domingans.

There could be no doubt as to its identity. It was the solitary passenger of the *Hawk*, the American, Hoagland!

CHAPTER VI

IN THE DARK

TWO hot hours later, Villeta and his party were aboard the slipshod train that—when so inclined and hurricanes permit—strolls, now and then, between Sanchez and Concepción de la Vega, the mantilla-hidden girl, package-laden Don Ramon, and Dan suitably clothed and restored to some semblance of his proper self. Dan's eyes had swept the Sanchez station for a renewed glimpse of Hoagland, and he breathed a sigh of relief when they could not find him. Nor had the passenger been anywhere in sight when Villeta and his niece returned to José's coffeehouse, and, since the planter had seemingly chanced to elude his unsuspected stalker, Stone maintained silence concerning him.

"Don Ramon," Dan finally reasoned, "appears to have arguments of his own for avoiding investigations. If I tell him his association with me has been observed and has resulted in an attempt

to follow him, he may think better of his bargain and decide to leave me behind."

That is what Stone's conscious self contended; but there is in every man a self more subtle. Dan's subconsciousness remained unsatisfied regarding the very genial Santo Domingan.

Some qualms, at all events, Villeta, on his part, must have had. When the train was delayed by an upturned switch just east of the terminus of La Vega, he ordered a premature descent lest—so he said—telegrams had advised the police there to be on the lookout for Dan's arrival, and the speed with which he conducted the exit of his party was worthy of admiration.

Here the air was bracing. Though La Vega lay on a flat savanna, mountains rose not far away, and one especially beautiful peak held the American's gaze.

"Ah, yes"—his guide was instantly aware of his preoccupation—"our beautiful Yaqui of the Cordilleras del Cibao. Myself, I prefer the Sierra de Monte Cristi and the dead volcanic north." He made a wide gesture. "Alas, it is in the opposite

direction that our path lies. We must leave this exquisite city—though it has, for its beauty, been called the love city of Santo Domingo. We must go tediously through the Dark Country. That striking acclivity yonder is the Cerro Santo, on which Señor Christopher Columbus, some four hundred and thirty years ago, placed one of his first great crosses in the New World. Now, turn to the left!"

But Dan fastened his fascinated gaze on the magnificent cathedral that shared with the "Holy Hill" dominion over the little city. There was a picture of this in the volume that Goldthwaite had destroyed; among the bitter recollections such thought awakened, Stone hardly noticed that once more they were threading by-streets—Villeta's knowledge of these towns seemed inexhaustible—and that they were proceeding to an inn, where mules awaited them, a broken-nosed Carib in charge.

"Señor Medico," said Don Ramon, "this is my faithful and devoted Luis." In Spanish he added to the Indian: "Is there any news?"

The tone was suspiciously altered for the last words, which received a negative reply from the Indian; but before Dan could weigh this distinction, an inquisitive landlord, who did not appear to know Villeta by sight, began to question him. Don Ramon, after a moment's survey of the man, became effusive in explanation:

"We are bound for Santo Cerro, to be sure, for the sugar plantation of the illustrious Señor Guanito. Come, Luis, let us start. We must arrive at our destination before sundown."

They mounted, the girl evidently friendly to her side saddle, and with elaborate adieus trotted off. Santo Cerro lay, as a matter of fact, toward the Sierras. The landlord watched the caravan set out in that direction; it seemed doubtful to Dan, however, if he saw them sharply turn at the next street to the left and proceed rapidly into a road to the southwest.

It was market day. La Vega was gay with farmers and their families from the uplands, men, women and children, creoles and mulattoes, in blue

denim, silk sashes and brilliant bodices, high sombreros and crimson turbans. Any party leaving the town was a party after their own hearts; the elders waved brown palms, the youngsters toddled up and offered each a cheek for kissing. Dan saw the señorita's lithe shoulders heave, saw her bend to pat the curly head of a laughing boy. He pressed his mount forward, he knew not why, and, as her hand returned, it brushed his.

"Now," said Don Ramon, immediately pushing between, "now you shall see the true Santo Domingo."

They made first for the plains and among the sources of the Yaqui del Norte, with its miraculous waterfalls, its rapids boiling over rocks of every brilliant shade. Luis headed the line, the girl followed, and Villeta and Dan, where it was possible, went abreast to bring up the rear.

The spirited planter never ceased a continual flow of conversation. The rich tones of it, warning roadside rodents and other minute animal life of the wilderness, caused strange rustling escapes be-

side them, the flapping retreats of brilliantly winged birds camouflaged until they were nearly within a hand's reach, and contrasted oddly with the silence of the guide and the girl. Dan was suddenly aware that he had not yet heard the Señorita Gertruda's voice. He discovered himself wondering what it would be like.

Once only was the order of march shifted, and the shift revealed that the Indian lived in mortal terror of his master.

Ramon interrupted some jovial description of local customs to urge his mount ahead with certain instructions for the guide. The trail was overgrown, and Luis intent on picking it; a bamboo stalk slipped from his protective grasp and brushed the Castilian's swarthy cheek. As if it were a thunderbolt, that stalk slew Villeta's smile.

"*Quita alla!*" he cried, and added a thumping oath. "*Es possible?*"

A moment ago, Luis had looked anything but a coward. Now, as he turned in his saddle, stark terror stared from his eyes. Don Ramon, with

a single blow, knocked him clear of his mule and a yard into the thicket.

As quickly as it had come, however, the storm passed. Luis returned, his face a tangle of thorn scratches, to his ever-advancing post, and Villeta, resuming his smile as a man might pick up his hat, came back to Dan and continued his anecdote.

The girl rode on with bowed head, and the American marveled at her stoicism no less than at his own self-control. He was sure that the former arose from some mysterious fear of her uncle rather than from a tropical callousness; the latter he dared not trace to its source. He vowed that if Villeta were in any way half so cruel to the girl as to the servant, he—Dan—would forcibly take up her cause. Then he laughed bitterly for his impulsiveness, and youthfully swore to himself he would never be impulsive again.

Nor, with the passing of his brief shower of anger, did the planter exhibit the faintest need for further mistrust. His smile was open, and his luminous eyes kept turning toward Stone in frank

good nature. Within five minutes more, it was next to impossible to believe him guilty of what all eyes had seen.

The pilgrims reached roads of sorts and, before these ceased, climbed along their dusty and uneven tracks. Now heavy vegetation steamed all about; again appeared open spaces dotted by thatched and whitewashed huts and broken by tiny farms. The first valleys were fragrant with the perfume of coffee blossoms grown in the shade of trees designed for the aromatic plants' protection; higher up, these surrendered to maize and sweet potatoes, and, as the very heights approached, to fields of millet.

Finally the travelers dipped to the edge of the great jungle of the interior. Straight into this Luis nosed an invisible way for more than two miles. Then, out of an unexpected clearing rose the ruins of a forgotten castle, its fallen masonry overgrown by rank weeds, among which lizards darted to their holes; and here the sudden sun flashed a farewell and sank. The party was in

total darkness and must so remain until moon and stars should achieve nocturnal brilliancy.

Luis, with the aid of a flash lamp, made their preparations for the night. Out of miraculous saddlebags he produced a score of necessities. He slung hammocks from tree to tree, he canopied them with nettings; he built a fire and soon produced a supper.

The girl ate scantily, alone and in the shadows. Don Ramon proved a mighty trencherman and laughed through the meal, commending its cook as if nothing but kindness and respect had ever passed between them. Dan decided he was puzzled simply because he was in the presence of customs entirely new to his thoroughly North American mind.

"No bread," Don Ramon smiled to Dan. "We prefer millet in Domingo. But see these yams. You do not have green plantain in the United States, nor yet cassava roots." He raised his eyes ecstatically. "Think of Christmas dinner without cassava pudding! And our coffee—your people possess no such coffee as ours." His eyes an-

swered the gleam of the camp fire, and he rubbed his hands. "So," he breathed over a deftly rolled cigarette, "you will cure my friend Tucker?"

"If we are in time," Stone reminded him.

"Of course—if we are in time. And who knows?" Ramon genially continued. "We may even acquire on my plantation a little of what you call yellow jack to keep you amused. We have many interesting diseases in Domingo—elephantiasis, fevers, the sleeping sickness, which I think is mostly feigned. Oh, you should have experience and to spare, when you leave us!" He rubbed his plump hands again. "When you leave us," he repeated, then added as if reflectively: "A thousand nice, clean dollars a month—yes, yes. And accidents, too. There are unfortunately occasionally little accidents where there is machinery."

He paused. Something sinister ran through all his joviality even as, with one fat palm upraised and its outspread fingers bright with jewels, he mirthfully requested better attention.

"You hear that? No?"

Dan nodded. From far away there came the monotonous beating of a drum.

"The *papalois* of blacks whose fathers crossed the hills from Haiti," Villeta explained. "That is the first call to their rites of voodoo."

To the sound of this vesper summons, the travelers sought their hammocks; but sleep was tardy in its approach toward Dan. He thought over all the events that had led him to this dark resting place. Incidents of his earliest boyhood encroached on his consciousness, hand-in-hand walks with his father years ago. Pictures of school days and college days. His pursuit, along a narrow, straight path, of respected success among his fellow townsmen. He reviewed the horrors aboard the *Hawk* with their ultimate and fatal climax and asked himself how he could have curbed his anger, even if he had taken time to reflect. He lay again on the damp sands, rode again in the dangerously careening surrey, was once more in Don José's coffeehouse looking down through the blinds at Don Ramon and his niece, and the stealthily trailing figure of Hoagland, the *Hawk's* passenger.

He shuddered, but the shudder fled. Stone turned to the memory of a fallen mantilla and the soft gaze of frightened black eyes. The tropic moon rose, washing trees and vines in liquid emerald, and with it rose all the night sounds of the West Indian forest: the whistling frogs, barking as of wild dogs, the buzz of insects and a guttural chorus which reminded the tossing Stone of nothing so much as the cries of baboons heard on his single visit to the Bronx Zoo.

When he did sleep, it was to waken with a start. Cold sweat was rolling into his wide eyes. He brushed it away. The bright moon was reënforced by the last glow of the fire. Directly above his head the mosquito netting bulged downward; something that had not been there before—something like a tree limb from one of the trunks supporting his hammock. The limb swayed.

It fell. Clammy and slimy and heavy it fell and, circling canopy and hammock, the thick coils of the snake wrapped Dan around and squeezed.

A shriek rang out. Not his own; he saw, in

a green streak of moonlight, the beautiful face of the girl distorted by terror. Dan had no chance to cry; he was struggling with all his imprisoned strength at the horror that encircled him.

"Coming!"

That was Ramon's voice. The huge man flung himself upon the monster. The thing's flat head darted up and gaped at him. With an exultant laugh, Villeta ripped that head from its bloody body.

Dan slept no more, and all next day his unrefreshed physique was taxed by the party's continued penetration into the jungle. It was one long push through trees and bushes bound together by wiry creepers under arches of lofty green. Orchids, now lovely and now repulsive, bloomed about them, jasmine odors fanned their sweating cheeks, stinging insects beclouded them and land crabs scuttled underfoot. Only the never-resting trade winds made it possible to endure.

Not until the latest afternoon did they reach their journey's end. They came upon a slatternly pueblo of adobe huts, toiled wearily along a more

or less modern road and halted before a high stone wall covered with cracking cement. It was yellow and weedy, and it stretched to right and left until it disappeared in the renewed jungle.

Ramon rode up to a thick, nail-studded door and jangled a bell. The door swung wide. Six half-clothed peons stood there, waiting to welcome their master.

"We are home at last," said Villeta. "Señor Medico, consider all on my poor estate your own."

A strange arrival. No shouts from the servants; the only smile that upon Don Ramon's round face. The half-savage peons drew aside while the cavalcade rode up a mile of neglected avenue.

The great *palacio* appeared beyond a curve, on a hillock. It was a double balconied, rambling building of stone, partly new, but mostly very aged and colored a deep pink. It rose before them from behind a semicircular clearing, sprinkled, none too artistically, with sago palms, hedges of hibiscus, century plants and aloes. In a marsh to their left, a grove of mangroves steeped their roots in dank water where mosquitoes bred, and, be-

tween these and the house, Dan noticed, with strange interest, a deserted graveyard, its flat tombs askew and broken, its stones moss-covered and half hidden among rubber trees and melancholy vines.

Something else, however, straightway caught his eyes. It was a crumbling chapel that leaned against one side of the older portion of the *palacio,* attached to the east wing and seeming, on second glance, to form part of the dwelling. He could see that it was, or had been, a perfect example of the ecclesiastical architecture of New Spain. Enthusiasm fired his voice.

"That's a fine thing. I must look that over one of these days."

Don Ramon turned sharply and then, under the fixed but noncommittal gaze of his niece, as sharply turned away.

"Only an old chapel," he said. For the first time he addressed Dan brusquely. "Interesting only to me, and to me only because my late wife's ancestors lie buried in it or about it." He glanced rapidly toward the girl and inclined his great head

slightly. "My wife's and, to be sure, my dear niece's. Toussaint's soldiers wrecked it when they drove the Spaniards out of all the island, and after the return, it was never repaired. The stone roof is dangerous. A pair of my inquisitive peons —my servants," he quickly corrected, "were killed in the place as late as February. Therefore I have locked it up."

He eyed Dan again; he was smiling now, but now his smile was different. "Those prying servants; their death was one of the things I thought of when I spoke to you of accidents. You remember that I spoke to you of accidents last night?"

Dan met that smile wonderingly. "Why, yes."

"Very good. I must ask you not to venture near the old chapel, Señor Medico."

And then into Dan's mind there readvanced a question that had troubled him all the while he waited for Don Ramon at the coffeehouse of José Logronó in Sanchez—a question that only the difficulties and dangers of the subsequent journey had banished.

"Why did this man offer such a salary to a third-year medical student, turned beach comber and wanted by the police? For a thousand a month I'll bet he could have hired any two regular physicians in all Haiti and Santo Domingo!"

CHAPTER VII

FLYING STEEL

THEY came to a long flight of wide pink steps, narrowing at the top, and to the *palacio's* ancient doorway surmounted by a pure Spanish fanlight. While Dan made sure of the medicines that had been brought, two native servants, who looked like cattlemen, stepped from out of the shadows, their machetes thrust in belts made by twisting around their waists lariats that would easily support the weight of a man. The peons leaped toward the tired mules and, at a gesture from Don Ramon, who did not otherwise greet them, led the animals away in broken-nosed Luis' company. A mere word from her uncle, and the girl, with no phrase or glance of farewell, hurried through the open door and disappeared down a vaulted hallway. To Stone, Villeta repeated the Castilian form of welcome.

"First of all," said Dan, condemning himself

for not having thought more of the sick man, and now thoroughly intent on the saving of life, "I'd like to see my patient."

"My dear fellow!" Villeta put his brown, jeweled hand gently on the young man's shoulder. "You must have refreshment. You must bathe and rest! There is no such haste after a two day's journey."

"But I told you that he might be dead by now!"

Don Ramon's wide face shook in smiling dissent. "You were too occupied to hear? But no. It is your wholly excusable ignorance of Spanish. My servants say he is not dead—not even a little. And now"—he smiled deprecatingly as if at Stone's zeal—"this so-lucky patient must be made ready."

In the twilight of the corridor, Dan had been trying to ascertain whether his medicines were intact.

"Not at all!" he exclaimed. His professional manner, though young, would brook little interference; here he must be his own master. "The patient," said he decisively, "needn't be made ready for his doctor, nor, in the circumstances, need his doctor be made ready for the patient. I've

come a long way, and the man was very sick when I started. I wish to see him at once, if you please."

Ramon murmured protestingly. "*Muy señor, mio——*"

From far down the hall a raucous scream interrupted him in the Domingan cry for help: "*Socorro! Socorro! Socorro!*"

Something rushed through the dark air. A wing brushed Dan's startled face, and then, by the light from the still opened door, he saw a green-and-yellow parrot settle on one of his host's broad shoulders and begin to peck in a sort of insolent affection at Villeta's swarthy cheek.

"Do not be alarmed," Don Ramon smiled. He put up a plump hand and stroked the bird with a kindness unmistakably genuine. "This is only my best friend, Pedro. Pedro, this is the good American doctor who is come to cure Señor Tucker." And in Spanish he bade the bird speak to his guest and apologize for having startled him.

Pedro cocked his head and glared at Dan with an evil eye.

"*Lo siento!*" he squawked, but, if he indeed knew what he was saying, his tone and expression belied the apology inherent in the words.

Meanwhile, Villeta appeared to have been using this diversion as a cover to reconsider Dan's indubitably fixed demand. The young doctor could not understand the hesitation.

"So you must see your patient at once?" Villeta repeated.

"At once," said Dan firmly.

Don Ramon shrugged. "You American doctors!" he chaffed. "So impetuous! But I think the results of your impetuosity justify themselves. I have the utmost confidence in American doctors."

He had submitted. Dismissing Pedro, he led the way up broad stairs and then through long and echoing corridors.

This portion of the building—obviously the old portion—seemed untenanted, and yet Dan had the sense of unseen presences. Once he thought he heard the patter of bare feet ahead, yet nobody was overtaken—nobody visible. Again his ear was caught by what sounded like a woman's sob, but

neither Ramon's niece nor any other woman came into view. So Villeta and his physician made a half dozen turns, past rooms apparently deserted, and came to a narrow stone staircase up which they climbed to the very top of the house. As they mounted, Villeta talked genially as always, but in a voice that seemed gradually to rise and was, Dan somehow suspected, meant to carry a warning of their approach.

They now gained another hall and here, at one closed door more, Villeta stopped. He spoke against the panel to some one behind it:

"It is the master," said he in Spanish. "I bring a strange doctor—not the Sanchez medico, but an American."

Was there the slightest sound from within? Dan could have sworn to one, yet when, after an instant's unnecessary pause, they entered, he observed no occupant save the sick man.

That one, in a bare apartment, under a high and narrow window, lay on a lofty old four-poster bed, tossing to and fro, his long fingers plucking at the sheet that covered him from feet to chin.

His age was perhaps fifty-two or three, and the stiff hair of his head, as well as the stubble on his cheeks, was iron gray. In health he must have been one of those gaunt New Englanders of the Massachusetts coast whose families used to recruit the whaling trade; intolerant men and hard, but honest and brave, who see small help for themselves or anybody else in a future world, yet live in this one a life of rectitude. How fallen he might be from the estate of his forbears, there was now no telling; his face was purple, his eyes feverishly aglare, and his lips so stiffened as to emit only, at rare intervals, a low groan.

"Unconscious?" asked Don Ramon.

Dan lifted an eyelid. "Unconscious."

"But you can bring him around?" Villeta frowningly gnawed at his fingers. Now that he had admitted the physician, he seemed to be in the utmost haste. "The work is of such an importance and so immediate. If you can bring him around for one week only——"

Stone was busy with an examination. "If he gets well for a week, he gets well entirely. I

want hot water; there must be a counterirritant. Tumblers—spoons"—he looked about the all-but-empty room—"hot-water bottles, or cloths, if you've nothing better. I suppose there is no ice? And I must know just how this man has been kept alive so far, and why is there no one here to nurse him now?"

"There is—or there just has been!" Don Ramon soothed. "I, too—I cannot understand the absence. The nurse must have stepped out for something."

"What has he been fed? I must have full details." There was about all this too much the look of neglect to suit Dan. If the patient was to be cured, there could be no longer any carelessness or inattention. "A nurse must be in constant attendance!"

"I am amazed that he left even for a moment," said Don Ramon. He looked really perplexed, and Dan softened a little.

"The fact is, Don Ramon," said he, "that it is miraculous that this man is still alive. If he is to continue to live, I must have all the help I can get."

"You shall! You shall!" Villeta, one eye on the unconscious man, paced the somber room.

He appeared to consider the advisability of confidences. Then, seeing nothing in Dan's eager young face to dissuade him, he proceeded:

"You thought, perhaps, that I seemed too much to realize the impossibility of great hurry at the start of our journey; now, having made the journey, you should understand that I was but facing facts like a philosopher, which I am. It required nearly two days to go to Sanchez and two to return. It may be I had other errands of equally vital importance. But those are completed. I should say, one of them is satisfactorily completed." Don Ramon, still pacing the floor, looked the soul of honesty. "But now you are here. I tell you truly, Señor Josiah Tucker is more important to me at present than anything else—anybody else—on my estate." He looked anxiously at Dan, who all this time was attentively occupying himself with the man on the bed. "My dear fellow, do everything in your power to save him!"

"Then have me sent at once the articles I called

for! Your—your servants"—he caught himself in time—"have you none that understands English?"

Villeta's eyelids flickered as if in self-questioning.

"No," he said. "None save my personal servant, and he understands and speaks only incompletely. But you shall have his services whenever possible, and by all—all—your every gesture shall be obeyed." He turned to the door. "I go now to have those articles brought to you. When you have done all for the time possible, inquire for the *comedor*—that is to say, the dining room, and do me the honor of joining me there for a poor supper." He hesitated again. "Tucker is quite unconscious, is he not?"

The ample planter's bulk filled the doorway. He did not frown, but he seemed, in one final comprehensive regard, to take note of the young doctor's straight, youthful figure, his straight blue eyes and, above all, his almost bristlingly straight, tow-colored hair. Villeta's right hand had involuntarily sought his white teeth in momentary

hesitation, as the doctor corroborated his first examination; then the hand lowered.

"Yes," Dan replied, "the patient is quite unconscious."

Don Ramon gave a great sigh. He left the room.

Only a few minutes later there came a knock at the door. Though Dan hurried to open it, he found no one there, and yet his orders had been wonderfully fulfilled. On the tiles of the passage stood everything of which he had need.

Grumbling, however, at the lack of another's presence, he set to work in the dual capacity of physician and nurse. Desperately he toiled over the man before him; the crisis was apparently passed. The fever must be slowly abating. The patient was nevertheless still a very ill man. How he had lived until now Stone could not divine. The fellow must possess in remarkable degree the resistance of both a good constitution and a strong will. However, it was now clear that, with proper care, he would continue to live, and that was the point of immediate import.

Under his fellow countryman's ministrations,

Tucker gradually entered another state. He began to move feebly; the glassiness left his eys, and he passed directly from complete unconsciousness to semidelirium. Incoherent phrases tumbled from his lips, now in Spanish, now in Yankee speech. Dan did not try to catch their meaning, nor, at first, would he have been able to, for they were barely mumbled. Then, all at once, they became distinct:

"Ink—this won't do. It won't do! Ink, ink! I must have——"

He half sat up. He laid hold of the physician's muscular arm.

"Yes, yes," said Dan. A medical student true to type, he had the habit of most doctors and all nurses, who regard every sick man as either a baby or an idiot. "You shall have ink, and a pen, and paper, too—just as soon as you are a little better."

"Ah, paper!" This had been an unfortunate suggestion. It increased Tucker's excitement. "That's it. That's what I was trying to think of! I can't wait any longer. I must have it

now." The delicate fingers clutched at the air as if reaching for it. "Paper—paper—paper!"

Complete sentences followed, but now utterly unintelligible. Stone explained to himself that his patient probably wanted to write home to wife or child, or else that an expected letter from the States had failed to arrive. Something, at all events, was increasing the sick man's excitement to a dangerous degree; it was becoming intense to the point of complete delirium. He was tossing with such violence that, unaided, Dan must soon become incapable of holding him.

There was a bell rope. Dan pulled it, but heard no answering jangle. He rushed to the door. He uttered a few useless imprecations. Just in time he held back a summons in Spanish. He wished he had never told that lie about his ignorance of the language, but now, in his strongest voice, he called in English for help.

He dreaded to leave his patient, and yet he must have assistance. He ran a few paces down the hall; it was empty. Then, not daring to remain longer absent, he turned back.

The door had somehow closed behind him. As he reached for the knob, he was startled into momentary inactivity by a new sound from within; it was the sound of a voice totally different from the New Englander's.

It was thin and high pitched; it was unmistakably Domingan. With foul spurts of native dirtiness, it was shrieking in the island patois:

"You rabbit fool that are food for the snake! You talk too much. I told you to hold your tongue before the doctor! I told you! By the Diamond of the Toad but now you shall pay!"

It was the strangest sort of phraseology. Dan's ears caught the general import of the words, but he could hardly credit his hearing. He flung wide the door—and then he could hardly credit his eyes.

Like nothing human, like a black jungle cat, like a devil, a hideous form was kicking in the bed. It knelt right upon the patient's chest, and its long yellow claws were digging deeper and deeper into the sick man's throat.

Dan leaped upon the creature and wrenched it off. With loathing hands and rising hair he tossed

it, struggling and spitting, into the farthest corner —a dwarf hunchback with a twisted face.

Panting from the exertion, the doctor turned to the patient, whose breath was stertorous. Then something warned him not to lose sight of the object in the corner, and he wheeled again.

It was not a moment too soon. Across the room flew a vicious knife. He dodged just in time. The long blade buried itself a full two inches in the soft wood of the wainscoting not half a foot from his heart.

CHAPTER VIII

A FIGHTING CHANCE

AT the same instant, Dan rushed the hunchback, and the hunchback leaped at Dan. The impact was terrific, but its advantage lay all with the dwarf. He had jumped directly for the oncoming head; arms and legs tightened about Dan like the tentacles of an octopus, and fangs as if a dog snapped at his throat. The American, overcome by the speed and power of his opponent, staggered backward. Then heavy feet pounded on the flags of the corridor; Stone's summons had been heard below. Don Ramon puffed into the room.

"Que—que—que?"

He plucked the hunchback like a lizard from his perch and held him dangling by the collar of his ragged shirt. Pedro, the parrot, swaying lightly on his master's shoulder, and by no means dislodged by that one's effort, regarded the situation with malign interest.

"*Que—que—que?*" he raucously repeated.

"The patient was violent," panted Dan, his sleeves having worked up to his elbows and the muscles of his forearms showing angrily firm. "I ran for help. This maniac must have been hiding under the bed. When I came back, he was strangling Tucker. I don't know what he is or where else he can have come from, but will you kindly throw him out of this room?"

He turned his back resolutely on the dwarf and, hurrying to the sick man, rapidly assured himself that the hacienda's engineer was not desperately the worse.

"Fernando Peña!" Villeta's voice was that of a bull. He spoke to the hunchback in the same dialect as that used by the hunchback himself, but the physician's ears, cocked to attention, missed nothing: "How often have I told you that it is important he should live?"

Dan glanced over his shoulder. At Don Ramon's feet the hunchback cringed, his talons, that had thrown the murderous knife, raised in trembling supplication. It was a frightfully distorted shape,

clad only in his shirt and abbreviated trousers. The eyes burned under shaggy brows; from one high cheek bone downward across the yellow face ran a tallowy scar that drew the mouth up in a crooked and perpetual grin. The American turned from the sight with renewed distaste. He regretted with all his heart that he had ever had to come to this mysterious and violent hacienda. Even capture might have been less repulsive.

Resuming his ministrations, he heard the deformed creature break into a torrent of pleading and defense. It was, in its unpunctuated velocity, a version of the island patois that, to be wholly understood, would have required Stone's undivided attention, but he made out readily enough that Peña sought to justify his recent actions through some obscure fear, and woven into every second phrase was the shrill cry:

"Tucker talks!—Tucker talks!—Tucker talks!"

"He was only——" Dan had been about to repeat, in confutation, what the patient had said. When he had impulsively pretended his ignorance of Spanish, he merely regretted the necessity for

the lie. Now, willy-nilly, he must hold to that lie as long as he remained under this roof. Something—some undefined attitude on the part of the inhabitants, if nothing else—had driven him to the conclusion that any admission of a knowledge of Spanish would entail real danger. Villeta was, moreover, already in the act of translating—glibly and falsely.

"My personal servant," he smiled apologetically, and his voice was soft and smooth again, "this Fernando Peña, says that Señor Tucker became violent and he, trying to hold him, was so attacked by you—who of course misunderstood his intent—that he somewhat lost his temper. He is sorry."

Dan had done his best for the patient. He gave Don Ramon his full face and made it as much a mask as he was able, in the circumstances, to do. As his clear blue eyes stared into the complacent features turned toward him, he decided it would be healthy to continue to assume the mask, however difficult for his naturally telltale countenance.

"I see," he said, but his lips drew tight in spite of himself. The little matter of the knife had not

been mentioned. "Well, Tucker didn't need any such excessive attention. It is unfortunate, besides, because it may retard if not actually prevent his recovery. He had excited himself by repeating certain words——"

Don Ramon nibbled at his nails; he raised his brows. "What words? Do you recall them, Señor Medico?"

"Oh, it was just delirium. Something or other about paper and ink. I think he must have expected a letter, or else he probably wanted to write home about his illness."

Was there a quick intake of a breath? Dan glanced toward Tucker, but, though the sick man moved restlessly from side to side, he was breathing almost normally now. The huge planter and the gargoyle dwarf stood as still as statues.

"Words of that sort from a man in this condition," Dan continued, and he was glad he could make his voice sound professionally disinterested, "hardly ever mean much, though they sometimes indicate obsessions. Our main job now is to give Tucker rest and quiet, and not let this man of

yours try any more stunts in what you call a mere fit of temper."

"There, there!" said Don Ramon, waving a persuasive hand on which the jewels glittered. "It will all go well henceforth. Fernando will be more careful, I can assure you. He is perhaps a little excitable. The poor fellow's temperament is tropical; it is no worse than that. There is no better husband on the island, no gentler——"

"Husband!" Despite his medical studies, Dan shuddered at that mystery of the human heart which could win such a creature as Peña a wife. Stone was the last man willfully to hurt a deformed being by any exhibition of his horror for deformity, and yet he involuntarily began to frame an impulsive query. "Do you mean to say——"

"Fernando," declared Don Ramon, "has a handsome spouse living just beyond the village, and she is as fond of him as he is fond of her and good to her. Now do, please, tell me of your patient's general condition. That is our vital concern—is it not so?"

"He can live if he's given half a chance," Dan grudgingly admitted.

"He shall be given it; he shall be! And now," said the planter soothingly, "why not administer him a draft to quiet him? Do, and let us all descend and sup. My own meal was interrupted, and I am famished. You say that my dear Tucker requires quiet; give it him. You can leave him safely now. I will send Luis to stay here and report to us any change. Come! We shall all feel more at peace with the world for eating."

The physician gave a final thoughtful survey of his patient. There was some truth in what Ramon said. Dan agreed to his suggestion.

"And now," said Villeta, softly rubbing satisfied palms together once he had got his way, "the quarrel will be healed. Fernando," he ordered, "you will shake hands without delay with the Señor Medico. It is the custom of North America."

The hunchback slunk forward without protest and, in movement like a recalcitrant child who has agreed to kiss and make up, put out the long and bony hand that had so lately sought to kill the

man to whom it was now offered. The resemblance was only in movement; there was nothing of childish innocence in Fernando's look.

Villeta was facing Dan, so that Peña's malformed back was presented to him; he could not see his servant's face, but Dan saw. Mingled with the fellow's smile of repentance was an expression of concentrated malignity; it was with cold and evil-boding fingers that Stone returned the handclasp.

Don Ramon led the way out and Dan followed. Over his shoulder he saw the hunchback dart to the wall, drag out the murderous knife and sheath it before leaving the room. As the American continued on his way, he realized that nothing but the fear of arrest held him within the hacienda—nothing except that, and the still unexplained appeal he had caught from a girl's limpid eyes.

The dining room was a vast and shadowy apartment, lighted only by a single pair of candelabra on its big mahogany table. Two covers were laid, and one of these proclaimed Villeta's recent interruption. Dan's mind again flew to the girl.

"The Señorita——" he began.

"Eats always alone," said Don Ramon. "It is a custom among the ladies of our country when there are strangers in the house."

Strangers! They had made that long journey together; she had slept last night in a hammock not five yards from his own; her cry had saved his life. Dan mentally refuted Don Ramon's definition.

It was true that Stone had not exchanged one audible word with her, that once only had he fully seen her face, that, with all her look of appeal, there had been something in that very glance which bade him retreat. Her voice—unless that muffled sob he had fancied on his first trip through the corridors was hers—he had heard only once, and then in an unrecognizable shriek of terrified warning. Yet the warning had been for him alone, and she might have now been sitting at his side so completely did the thought of her dominate him. Present, she had impressed him deeply; absent, he found her more potent still.

It was a giant's meal: *anguilas y queso rollado*—

eels and a grated cheese, very strong—a mixture of rice and beans, sweet potatoes and bananas. The flavor of garlic and the bite of pepper were not to Dan's simpler taste, and the frying in olive oil was perhaps overrich, but of its style the cooking was notably good, and the wines had quite evidently been raised from a cellar musty and cobwebbed with age. Everything was suggestive of good living for the master, everything in sharp contrast to the ill-favored and dour retainers.

Dan's recent enemy, Peña, waited on the diners in a silence that was too soft-footed. Now he was at Don Roman's elbow, now at Stone's, appearing like a jinni summoned from the shadows, changing as he altered his distance. Not once throughout Villeta's jokes and chatter was Dan able to dispossess his mind of the hunchback's proximity. Outwardly no one could have been more genially frank than the master of this house, with the brightly colored bird snatching titbits from between his teeth. Yet mystery of a far-from-alluring sort lurked in every dim corner of the *palacio.*

"You must take a look around my little estate in the morning." Don Ramon smiled across the stretch of napery and candlelight. "It is something that must seem novel to North Americans."

Dan was about to make a polite response when he saw the face of Fernando Peña grinningly mirrored in a silver plate before him.

"The tropical fruits out there in my gardens," Villeta lavishly ran on, "bananas, breadfruit, oranges, tangerines—you will be free to help yourself to them. Everything is yours."

Yet, in that instant, Fernando's gnarled hand, moving around his master and placing a heaping dish of twice-roasted tortillas before him, reminded the American of how short a time ago it had attempted his life!

"But the chapel you noticed," Don Ramon continued almost parenthetically, "that alone, as I have said, I must forbid you to enter. For some antiquary it might be a thing of beauty to be sure, but of a dangerous and deadly beauty, too. None can venture there safely, and so"—he pushed a large forkful of the tortillas between his pro-

truding lips—"I have given explicit orders. I wish no more deaths on my hands."

"Too bad it's in such poor condition," commented Dan, intrigued into momentary enthusiasm by the mention of the crumbling edifice. "Now, architecturally it is——"

He was startled into silence by a drop of hot coffee which was spilled on his wrist. Peña again!

"Yes, yes. One day I shall have it restored, but until then——" Don Ramon sighed and closed the subject abruptly. He launched forth on a dissertation of the countryside's flowers and the high coloring of its birds.

At last the long meal concluded. Villeta, clapping his fleshy hands, addressed his servant, ordered him to conduct Dan to his bedchamber, and himself bade the American an elaborate good night. It had been an unpardonable discourtesy, he declared, to keep his guest up so late when he must be so weary.

The guest, however, could have wished for another guide, though the hunchback's manner had completely altered with new orders. He was servile

and smiling as, his grotesque form partly lighted by the candle he bore high above his head—an apish shadow of it cast on the paving—he led the way upstairs.

"I'll give my patient a bedtime visit first," said Dan.

It annoyed him that he dared not address the hunchback directly in Spanish when the man had such an imperfect knowledge of Stone's native tongue, but he managed to make his desire clear. His guide silently reversed their course. Luis was in the sick room when they entered it; the Carib gloomily reported no change.

Arrived at Tucker's side, however, Dan saw that delirium and fever had both disappeared. He spoke to the patient in a cheery American voice, remarked that the gray stubble of his beard might even be shaved off in the morning and suggested, as a spur to renewed interest in things mundane, an increasingly tempting diet. At first, only Tucker's eyes answered. Dan leaned over the bed to time the pulse and then realized that Tucker was trying to whisper something.

Could the delirium be returning? Stone leaned closer. The whispering ceased.

He moved just a little aside. Peña was peering, under his arm, straight into the patient's eyes.

There was no use in protest now. Pretending to have noticed nothing and postponing action of any sort in the matter until the morrow, Dan bade Tucker good night. He promised to call early in the morning and nodded to the patient a reassurance that he himself unaccountably doubted. Then he almost unwillingly gave Fernando instructions as to the medicines he left, listening while they were translated—accurately—to Luis for fulfillment.

Again following the grotesque hunchback and the flickering candle, Dan descended the staircase and passed through corridor after twisting corridor. They started to mount again.

"Look here," he objected, "I ought to be nearer Señor Tucker. Suppose I was needed quickly. Why, I couldn't even find my way!"

"Master order." Peña continued imperturbably onward.

Finally he stopped before a thick door, which he pushed slowly open.

"Here Señor Medico room," said he.

It was a large chamber, heavily curtained in spite of its tropical setting. Peña pointed out, in the long yellowish shadows cast by the candle, its canopied four-poster bed, in one gloomy corner; the tall mahogany wardrobe appearing actually short beneath the high ceiling; the highboy, the wash-stand, the two closely shuttered windows. There was no bell.

"Bring anything?" grinned the servant.

Dan hated that grin. "Not to-night, thank you. But I'll want shaving water in the morning."

"At eight, Señor Medico?"

"Better make it seven thirty. But no, on second thought, I'll call for it."

"As Señor Medico wish." The hunchback lighted a bedroom candle and, bowing derisively in the shadows, backed obsequiously away.

Alone, Dan looked the great apartment over. He walked to a window and, pushing wide its shutter, gazed out at a night heavy with luminous stars.

In opening that barricade he had loosed the full sound of jungle cries and whistlings, the yammering of farm dogs, the languorous scents of the tropical dark. Leaning far over the sill, tracing the uneven outline of the *palacio,* he could just discern the shape of the forbidden chapel at the farther extremity.

His imagination was free at last. Specters might tread the corridors of this strange mansion, but he was no longer haunted by them. He was even too tired to care about them. Instead, he let his mind turn to the lovely face which haunted him far more agreeably. He wondered where the girl slept; he wondered, too, if she slept. Somehow his heart ached for her in a curious pity.

He noted that his room, like his patient's, was high up in the building and that there was a sheer drop of fifty feet to the ground.

Weariness overcame him. He prepared for bed and climbed in. There was no use in brooding now over the past or the present; sleep was ready on his pillow.

From it, he wakened to an odd, regular, beating

sound. The night was at its blackest, but the sound was that of reiterant motion, the unmistakable working of machinery. Turning over lazily, he told himself that this was doubtless the effect of that pressing order of which Ramon had spoken.

Dan did not waken again until the full glare of the morning, when the chatter of innumerable birds made him sit bolt upright. It was only a few minutes after six, but the tropics were broad awake.

Out of the window he had opened the night before, he looked now—standing in his bare feet—on a scene of wild beauty. He could see, under the blue dome of the sky, a complete semicircle of the walled estate; here some small grazing fields for cattle, there woodland or acres of tobacco, and all about the house, just beyond the palm-sprinkled patio, the untidy banana trees—fields and fields of them.

Recollection of Villeta's easy explanation of his kind of estate assailed him. He was perplexed. With painstaking eyes he studied the landscape again, cacao trees, coconuts, patches of what looked

like melons, the mangroves steeping their roots in the graveyard swamp. Everything belonging to the tropics seemed to grow within the heterogeneous hacienda, everything, that is, but sugar cane.

Well, a man must shave, anyhow. Stone gave an eager moment to study of the exquisite but dangerous chapel. Then, still in his bare feet, he crossed the room to call for water.

As he drew the knob swiftly inward, the deformed figure of Fernando Peña toppled into the room.

CHAPTER IX

THE HUNCHBACK'S EYES

FACE to face with the unexpected physical action is man's first impulse; the art of attack and defense is merely the highly specialized expression of a primal instinct, and the Yorkshireman's philosophy is of primitive soundness: "A word and a blow, but the blow first." Dan's arm was quicker than his tongue, but he drew it back just before striking.

"What are you doing at my door?" he demanded.

Intense malignity had been again written on the dwarf's face in the instant of falling into the bedroom; now his expression became servile. His eyes were dull and humble as he answered:

"Señor Medico wake up. Fernando Peña hear him move. Come to ask if shaving water."

"I said I'd call."

"Señor Medico want shaving water?"

"I'll shave after a while. Were you outside this door all night?"

"But no—but no!" Peña shook his head in honest denial. "Not when Señor Medico sleep."

"So I don't need to be watched when I'm asleep? Well, there's some comfort in *that.* I'll go and see my patient as soon as I can jump into a few clothes. Can you tell me what sort of night he had?"

The hunchback seemed well informed of the doings of the house. He did not hesitate to admit and impart his knowledge of the patient. "Señor Tucker toss. He toss, but he not dead yet."

"I see." Dan scrutinized the man. There was plainly no particular desire in the fellow's mind that Tucker should live, though his devotion to his master would probably henceforth keep his temper in place. It was, Dan reflected, a dangerous sort of temper to maintain at too close quarters.

All through the devious passageways he watched for means of identifying the route. He did not wish this spying attendance. Another time, he thought, he might be able to find the patient without aid, although he was certain that once Peña doubled in order to befog him. What might possibly be the purpose of this circuitous procedure Dan did not

then attempt to guess. It was enough that they reached the sick chamber at last.

Tucker, in his high bed, was now deserted by Luis. He seemed destined to be deserted by his nurses, but pain also had clearly left him. He was thin, Dan noted, not altogether from the severity of illness, and his cheek bones stood out high and narrow; his chin was pointed and his lips atremble. The mouth Dan called either weak or sullen, or both; and the eyes, of an unblinking pale gray, were not prepossessing. These things and one more, showing plain now in the glare of tropic day; outside the sheet lay two white inert hands, the tips of all except the little fingers somewhat stained, but the hands themselves delicate and slim. They were not the sort one would expect in a mechanical engineer on a sugar estate, and yet they were hands that obviously were constantly used, and with skill.

"How are you feeling this morning, Mr. Tucker?"

Dan smiled with professional cheerfulness, which, however, did not altogether succeed in concealing his extreme youth. Somehow, he could not feel wholly sympathetic toward this man; but Tucker

was ill and neglected, and Stone meant to do his duty in any event and acquit himself honorably of his debt to his employer.

The man nodded slightly. It was as if he could not or dared not speak. The doctor bustled among his medicines, where Peña was beside him with ostentatious help.

Then, with the quick resolve of meeting guile with guile, Dan addressed the servant. "Fernando," said he, peering into a pitcher, "this water is full of ants. Run downstairs and get me some fresh."

To his amazement, the dwarf stared up dully but steadily—in refusal. "No."

They looked full at each other in a moment's contest of wills. If Dan could not overcome the servant's antipathy to him, he must take a final course. Peña was too important a member of the household for him not to realize that, and, however much Don Ramon might order him to be friendly, the hunchback would remain lord of his own sentiments. He appeared to be lord of his own actions as well.

"If you don't follow the doctor's orders," said Dan slowly, "this man may die. Shall I tell Don Ramon that that's what you want?"

Fernando spat.

Dan's anger rose. "You bring me the fresh water—at once—or I will throw up the case."

"I go! I go!" Peña had acknowledged momentary loss, but it was not Dan; it was only the dwarf's fear of displeasing Ramon that had conquered him.

Dan watched him, shaking his shaggy head and mumbling all the length of the room, make the turn at the door—waited until the soft footfalls no longer sounded, then hurried back to his patient and leaned over him.

"Now," said he, "quick—tell me what you were trying to say last night."

Tucker's weak eyes were pathetic, but traveled doubtfully from the doctor toward the doorway, which, however, was hidden by the high foot of his bed.

"Don't worry. He's gone." Dan hastened to give reassurance.

But, either from fear or prudence, the sick man, now gazing fixedly at the ceiling, would utter no sound. His lips began to shape themselves into unvocalized words. Dan watched, puzzled. Not the least whisper came, and he could rely on his sight alone for interpretation. It was only after considerable repetition that he made out, bit by bit:

"They want to get rid of me, but they daren't do it just yet. They need me a little longer. Look out for yourself, doctor. I can see you're not one of them, but"—here the patient's face showed the distress of desperation—"for God's sake get me away! I made only one mistake. I put out only one of our printings. That paper maker; he needed money—and I gave him—but what does that matter? Get me away! Get me away!"

There was no delirium here, however mystifying the phrases. At last the younger man's sympathy was aroused. He heard himself thoughtlessly reply in spoken words.

"Of all the damnable——"

"The fresh water, señor."

The servile tones were at his very elbow. The

hunchback stood there, his thick lips grinning, his manner deliberately obsequious, as he proffered another pitcher.

Dan seized it. He looked down into the dull eyes of the servant, which, though telling nothing, nevertheless always held a challenge.

"Pitcher little way down hall, señor," said Peña. "Luis maybe fill him. He all ready in hall. No ants now—nice, fresh water."

Dan glanced quickly back toward the bed. Josiah Tucker had closed his eyes. Beneath an excessive pallor he looked exhausted and hopeless. But Peña's expression as Dan turned back was one of rage fighting against crafty repression.

How much had the hunchback observed? He was just tall enough to see the moving mouth. Had he arrived only when Dan spoke aloud, or had he been silently standing there—concealed by Stone's back, peeping beneath his elbow—during the difficult moments of translation? And, in the latter case, had he, too, been able to read the lips of the helpless Tucker, or, merely attending, had he correctly guessed their import?

CHAPTER X

TWO MILLION DOLLARS

SILENT and doubtful, Dan concluded his early-morning duties to his patient, and was conducted back to his vast bedchamber. He prepared for breakfast. Fernando kept disconcertingly close while he finished dressing.

"Hot water, Señor Medico? Your socks here, Señor Medico! Here Señor Medico coat; Peña too small to help on."

The creature tried Stone's nerves almost beyond endurance. If Dan did not see him directly, he was forever catching his distorted reflection in a long mirror at the end of the room.

Mystery breathed through the entire hacienda. The forsaken graveyard, half buried in marsh, seemed alive with it, the very stones of the chapel whispered of it. There had been danger and to spare on the water front of San Lorenzo, but the danger of the gallows seemed, because it was more

tangible, almost less ominous than the secret perils of this house of empty passageways, set within the strange walled estate and guarded by peons—that was the right name for them!—who were equally terrified and terrifying.

And then there was that girl. Was it merely shyness, as he had at first supposed, that made her footsteps lag on the sands where he originally saw her? What had she been doing in San Lorenzo with an uncle who did not let her share his table when strangers were about, and who held her arm securely when she walked in public? Was he protecting her against invisible harms, and did she live in some impending danger that made her prefer this protection? Dan wished he had managed to talk with her and find out her trouble. Perhaps when Don Ramon came to trust him more, the planter would confide in him. Perhaps the trouble hung over the pair of them, and Villeta only simulated his cheerfulness.

And the sick man, Tucker. Save a fellow American? Of course. But from what? From the same danger, it was to be guessed, that threatened

the others. If so, Stone could find out just what it was—find out from his patient—on his next professional visit. After that, rescue—rescue if possible, for who was Dan, himself a fugitive, to be of any genuine help to anybody desirous of escape?

He descended to the ground floor gloomily, yet there the bright morning sunlight temporarily, at least, dispersed some portion of his dejection. Don Ramon, resplendent in fresh white, was waiting here, his vivid parrot, Pedro, seated on his shoulder and, reaching a gray bill forward, pecking at the full lips under his master's mustache.

The breakfast table was laden with bowls of gay flowers and torrid-zone fruits. Steaming coffee was brewing in a brass alcohol-heated percolator, and Don Ramon—who was dressed for a journey in spite of the color of his raiment—at once hurried forward to greet his guest.

His manner was the most radiant in the world. It gave every appearance of being spontaneous and inherent. He scattered good health and good nature, and waved Dan, with a genial smile and the

flash of his never-absent rings, to his seat at the table.

"You slept soundly? Yes?"

"Thank you," said Dan. He thought again of the machinery heard at night; then, glancing at his host, wondered if his own doubts were not the morbid results of his experiences aboard the *Hawk*. "And you?" he asked.

"I never sleep badly. That is what it is," said Don Ramon, "to have the clear conscience of a babe."

"And the"—Dan hesitated ever so little and knew that he blushed a great deal, but he brought it out with a sort of dogged determination—"and the señorita, your niece? She enjoyed a good rest, too?"

"My good friend, what could there be upon the conscience of a properly brought-up young girl? Tell me of your patient."

Dan had something to say about that, but the moment when Peña reached up a plate to him seemed not particularly auspicious. He reported in general terms.

Excused from the sick room, Luis assisted the hunchback this morning, the doctor anxiously wondering if his patient now had any attendant at all. Nevertheless, Dan settled himself with no outward sign of protest—and with a thoroughly normal appetite—to eating. The breakfast was, unlike the breakfast of most Continentals and those of Continental origin, an elaborate affair. Rashers of bacon, broiled fish, eggs baked with green and red peppers, heaps of sweet tortillas as on the night before. There was nothing wrong with the appetite of the master of the house. Don Ramon's mouth was always open for more, though, between tossings of food to the greedy parrot swaying on the table beside his plate, he talked as volubly as ever.

"I regret excessively that I must leave you to your own devices to-day," he said in his soft voice, with a polite bow and a smile that lighted his big round face.

"*Socorro! Socorro!*" squawked Pedro, and Dan looked up as the bird interrupted, with startled blue eyes.

"But," continued his master, stroking the parrot,

"when you are not completing the cure of our unfortunate Señor Tucker, you may look about the estate or read. I have quantities of books—English; among the collection many American novels of the sort that one of your several societies formed to suppress something or other, has succeeded in suppressing, so that you may not have seen them. You would like to look them over? Mostly, they are very stupid and mostly they are poorly written. When a book is stupid and poorly written, those quaint societies seem to think it is also evil, and I am inclined to believe they are right."

Dan was not sure that he cared for these volumes.

"Well, amuse yourself, at any rate. It is some distance I must go to meet some freight that I expect to be conveyed from San Lorenzo. I must meet it part way, at a transfer. *Regresáre á las siete*—I beg your pardon. I shall return at seven or thereabouts. I shall be happy to receive a good report of Señor Tucker this evening."

Dan, his patient heavily on his mind, tried to find a moment unsupervised by Peña, but, time pressing and the master of the *palacio* being on the

very point of leaving, he was finally forced to speak, if at all, before the hunchback.

"Don Ramon," said he, "there's a favor I want you to do for me."

Whether from something in Dan's tone or for reasons better known to himself alone, Villeta's eyes narrowed, but his smile was in his final answer.

"A favor? Whatever it may be, rest assured that it is granted!"

Dan was by no means sure of that. "I had hoped," he said, "to have a chance to speak of it to you in private——"

"Well? Well?"

Villeta seemed restless for elucidation. His already closely bitten finger nails were being impatiently nibbled toward the quick. Dan, who had previously observed this only as a sort of mark of identification, found himself now codifying the habit as a nervous affection subtly correlative of the mystery of the house.

"You want Tucker back at his work as soon as possible, don't you?" he nevertheless continued.

"Of a truth, yes!"

Peña hovered over them. He was unconcealedly listening.

"Well, my patient," Dan continued, "is being retarded in his recovery by a sick man's hallucination. He has a foolish fear of Fernando, this servant of young man's arm. "My dear fellow," said he, "I relieved of that attendance, I frankly can't guarantee recovery."

Stone felt rather than saw the dark look that swept over the dwarf's features, but Don Ramon burst into a great boisterous laugh and, while the parrot raucously echoed him, tapped Stone's arm with his fat jeweled fingers.

"My dear Señor Medico, this is very foolish! You as a physician, however immature—I beg your pardon—should not hold my poor servant's misfortune against him."

"I don't! I am speaking for my patient." The American felt his face unaccountably flushing.

"But Señor Tucker understands the temperament of my innocent Fernando."

"Sick men have violent fancies, Don Ramon," Dan insisted.

"Then," said Ramon with a sudden sharpness, "when they are nonsense they should be overcome, or they may grow to mania. There is altogether too much of this yielding to sick men's sick fancies by silly, abnormally sympathetic physicians. Pah! One would think their medical training would harden them, but I believe they're all as soft as Peña's wife or as this overripe mango." He carelessly spat the yellow pulp from his mouth. Then he leaned confidentially toward Dan and jogged the young man's arm. "My dear fellow," said he, "I really had more faith in an American doctor—even in one of your record. Why, ask Señora Peña—she will tell you that Fernando is as harmless as a lamb."

"Perhaps." Dan was determined not to let his own personal predicament influence his professional obligations. "But I myself don't like his constant companionship. It's quite unnecessary, and it's got nothing to do with his misfortune. I simply can't have anybody—*anybody*—dogging my heels the way this man does. I've never had a *valet de chambre* to wash my face and brush my teeth for

me, and I don't need one now. What's more, I won't stand for it."

His tone was incisive, his purpose firm. After the peon's impudence in the sick chamber and Tucker's appeal for rescue, he was resolved to be rid of Fernando at all hazards. Villeta's swift glance read the decision, and the planter shrugged and submitted. Out of one corner of his mouth, "*De nada, no es nada,*" he whispered to Peña, but the next instant he addressed Dan:

"Of course if the matter is personal to you, why, you are my guest and you shall have your wish. Did I not tell you, before you expressed it, that your wish should be granted?" He turned back to the brooding Peña, but now he spoke in English and no longer in a whisper:

"You hear the Señor Medico! If Señor Tucker cannot recover with you in attendance, you must completely surrender your position to Luis. Luis will therefore attend to both the sick American and the well American, and will do no more duties in the dining room for the present. "But"—and he faced Dan again—"you will have to transmit all

orders through Fernando, because Luis knows no English." Over his shoulder, Don Ramon ascertained that the broken-nosed Carib had left the room. He added softly to Fernando, with a leer that Dan's sharpened eyes did not miss: *"No durarâ mucho."*

There was nothing much in that of itself: "It will not last long." But Peña's reply was more explicit and seemed to involve his master as well as himself in its implications.

He, too, made certain that Luis was still absent. Then he burst forth in a torrent of Spanish that he never dreamed the American would understand:

"This is all a trick, my master. Watch these Americanos. We have enough! Why go to so much pains to get him well for a week? *Muerte al traidor!* Let me kill the sick man now!"

"Plenty of time for that!" said the planter placatingly. His smile never deserted him, and his voice was as soft as if he were speaking to a querulous child.

Dan bent his head low above his plate in order to hide the growing horror of his face. He could

not believe what he heard. But Ramon added emphatically and still in Spanish to the dwarf: "The extra paper comes to-day. Why stop short of our two million dollars?"

The parrot Pedro had hopped to one of the planter's shoulders, its bright-green head impudently on one side.

"*Muerte al traidor! Muerte al traidor!*" it shrieked and, shrieking, glared with horrible innuendo at the young American.

CHAPTER XI

FOOTSTEPS

DAN'S face, as he finally raised it, was impassive, but he had been enabled to paint impassivity there only because of the danger that dangled, he now felt sure, everywhere about him. The hacienda was haunted, but most of its ghosts were alive, and the worst of them all was some evil purpose. Of that one, the patient upstairs lay in desperate fear; it terrorized the lower servants. The hunchback was driven to ungovernable actions on its account; even Don Ramon scrawled his knowledge of it across the walls of his daily life. What—for she could not be guilty of a part in it—what was it doing to the vanished girl?

Dan meant to act, but before he acted he would put one question to the planter. Meanwhile, and before interruption was possible, Don Ramon, elaborately jocular and smilingly mendacious, pretended to translate the hunchback's remarks.

"Fernando is so sensitive," Villeta apologized. "He has an intricate and delicate soul—oh, in spite of his poor distorted shape!—and though he wishes, as he says, to oblige the Señor Medico, he so appreciated the honor of his position as guardian angel to our poor patient that you have much hurt his feelings!"

Peña, with a glare at this translation, the gist of which he plainly understood, left the room. He sent Luis, the broken-nosed Indian, back in his stead.

"But," continued Don Ramon, thumping his chest and marking the transfer of servants merely with a lowering of his eyelids, "I—I alone am master in my hacienda. My orders shall be obeyed. Anything for the good of my workingmen. That is my motto!"

His broad white teeth showed in a radiant smile. Dan wanted to hit him, but all he said was:

"I see. And, by the way, where do you grow your sugar cane, sir?"

Ramon regarded him through quickly narrowed lids. "Ah," said he, "you know sugar cane? And

you have already, so early, been exploring my estate?"

Dan ignored the first question. "No," he answered. "I haven't been exploring your estate, but I happened to look out of my window this morning, and I couldn't see any cane. It's your main product; I wondered where you kept it."

Don Ramon's parrot seemed to catch and hold Stone's eye. It stared unblinkingly at the American, with a glassy vindictiveness that could not be doubted. Dan wondered if, by some obscure sympathy, the bird reflected his master's feelings. There appeared to be an odd understanding between the pair; almost, there was a threat in Pedro's beady gaze. With a slight tremor, Stone looked from the brilliantly feathered creature to its master.

Villeta's head bent above his parrot now as he stroked its plumage. The voice in which he replied to his vis-à-vis was suave and unsuspicious. "You would hardly be able to see the cane from your window, my friend. We grow it on an outlying farm."

"But your work"—Dan wavered between doubt

and belief; he was determined to pin the man down—"that is here, isn't it, Don Ramon? The mechanical part of it?"

"How so, my friend?"

The young doctor raised a puzzled face. "Well," said he, "last night I was sure I heard machinery."

Villeta leaned forward over the table, pushing a bowl of goldfish from between him and Dan.

"I must sooner or later explain a small matter," said he in his honeyed and most confidential tone. "My business is a little—well, secret."

Dan said to himself: "Now we are getting down to cases."

"To speak frankly," the planter softly elaborated, "the Santo Domingan government places an exorbitant export duty on my product, so that I find it expedient to minimize, for my reports to them, its quantity. Add to this the import duty in the United States, and without some petty subterfuge I simply could not compete. I should be a ruined man." He spread out his fat hands as if in helplessness. Pedro sympathetically cocked his head and blinked into space. "Bootlegging is perhaps of

the same general nature, though what your countrymen call low grade—quite low grade. I must confess it is more profitable and, like all laws made by the powerful few, morally illegal. Personally, I am above such practice, however, just as I should not risk my excellent digestion with your famous 'home brew.' Legitimate business is another matter. The United States has no power to keep me from earning a reasonable living." He smiled sardonically, and his thick eyebrows lifted. "So, truly, but between ourselves, I may say that I am practicing a little deception—innocent in my mind, I assure you!—on the government. As you North Americans would so picturesquely put it, you—get me?"

Dan thought he did.

"Good! Like a genuine host I place my innermost secrets in your hands. Now," said he, as he deposited the golden remnant of fruit on his plate, dipped his fingers into a bowl of water, and proceeded to pick his teeth, "I wish to acknowledge with fitting generosity my appreciation of your services. There is no doubt in my mind. You are"—and he smiled —"saving Señor Tucker's life."

The parrot gave a loud squawk of disbelief. The abstracted Don Ramon stroked it soothingly.

"That," he declared, "is just now of paramount importance to me. If you can put him into working condition by the day after to-morrow—you seem to work miracles—there is no need for you to stay the month. I shall, indeed, pay you double the price I first mentioned in recognition of the cure. Meanwhile"—he beamed with his own lavishness—"I mean to pay you one thousand dollars right away."

The man seemed determined to placate him. Sitting perfectly still at the breakfast table, Dan watched Don Ramon, with Pedro perched securely on a shoulder, hurry from the room; he listened to his footsteps along the empty corridors. Idly at first he counted, all the time resolved somehow to be loyal to his patient, though loyalty to the master was no longer to be considered. He would save Tucker not only from disease, but from death—aye, and murder, too, however long he might have to stay in this dangerous house. Yes, and because she also must somehow want saving and must

certainly deserve it, he would contrive to save that girl as well! His mind went back to her like steel to a magnet, but throughout all this process, he subconsciously continued to count the echoing steps of his host.

Subconsciously at first; then with a purposeful deliberation. The steps ascended a staircase to the left; there were then ten staccato footfalls and the sound of a door that opened on hinges hungry for oil.

Broken-nosed Luis was slowly removing the plates. Dan, desperately seeking an ally, smiled at him a little, but secured no response. The Indian was stolidly, but by no means swiftly, bent on his work.

Stone continued to listen, now with strained ears. Just then that unoiled door above was again opened and closed. Ten footsteps followed, the stairs were descended, the length of the corridor traversed. Don Ramon reëntered the dining room.

With a flourish he gave to Dan what he carried, ten brand-new hundred-dollar bills.

"Behold!" said he and struck an attitude of phil-

anthropy. Pedro, always clinging to his shoulder, echoed it.

Dan took the money. It was, however, early in delivery, a bargained payment.

"Thanks." He somehow could not put the proper gratitude into his tone, though his heart leaped with the thought of all that the money would buy.

But Villeta's quick eyes had shot to Luis, and they saw that the Carib, carrying a couple of plates, stopped in mid progress and stood staring. Don Ramon flushed. Before, however, he could speak, Luis, overcome with nervousness, tripped and dropped his burden. The china clattered to the tiled floor in a hundred fragments. Ramon's rage raised his huge strength.

His fist closed over the flesh at the back of the Indian's neck; his face was rough with knotted muscles as he lifted Luis, like a kitten, from the floor and, with the merest premonitory swing of his own body to gain momentum, threw him across the room. The peon's head bashed against the edge of a mahogany buffet; he fell in a heap and fainted.

Ramon laughed at the inert figure. Then, for Dan's benefit, he addressed Luis:

"No, you needn't apologize at all! Sèvres china or a stupid Indian—for me the china is the harder to replace. Pah!"

Quite readily his muscles relaxed, and he turned again, thoroughly amiable once more, to the white-lipped American. He smiled affably as he said, with a shrug of explanation that held not the slightest morsel of regret:

"The only way to keep order with these cattle is to use what you so gallantly call 'the strong arm!' "

During all that vast exertion, Pedro had marvelously remained with his claws secure in the cloth above his master's shoulder. Now Villeta plucked him delicately from his perch, kissed him, and, with a tender gesture of affectionate farewell, flung him fluttering into the air.

"*Hasta la vista!*" He waved to the bird. A firm, easy step carried him toward the outer door, but he gave a final reassuring smile to Dan: "Señor Medico." He waved gayly. "*Hasta la vista!*"

CHAPTER XII

FOLLOWED!

"LUIS!"

The Indian still lay in a huddled heap, but his breathing was now steady. In answer to Dan's cry his eyelids fluttered. He tried to smile—failed—lay silent. There was an ugly gash, not dangerously deep, just above his right temple.

Dan's swiftly questing fingers revealed no broken bone. He saw that a drawer of the buffet stood open. It contained fine table linens. Heedless of consequences, he tore several of the napkins into bandages, cleaned the wound with water from a carafe, and bound up the sufferer's head.

Evidently a man of iron, this tall, broken-nosed Carib; in an hour, perhaps, he would be about again, yet some rest he must have. Dan thought first of taking him to his own room; then recalled that, next to Tucker, was a small and apparently empty bedchamber to which he had himself hoped to be assigned. Well—he smiled sternly—it would

be more convenient to have his patients close together.

Fernando's precautions had at first muddled his sense of the plan of the house, but he knew a road well enough now, however circuitous it might be. The moment Luis showed definite signs of returning consciousness, Dan put one of the Indian's arms about his neck, supported him by the waist, and half led, half carried him to the chosen room at the top of the *palacio*.

They passed no one. Tucker's door was closed. In the neighboring bedchamber stood a bed bearing an uncovered mattress. On this Dan, with practical skill, made Luis as comfortable as possible. Having fastened the door softly against any eavesdropper, he returned to the wounded man, who lay now with his eyes open and intelligent.

"Many—many thanks," murmured the Indian, and Dan for the first time noted that, in spite of its broken nose, the face was pleasant, even fine of its sort.

"Oh, there's nothing to thank me for," he said in Spanish. "There is something else of far more

consequence. What I want you to do is to tell me honestly what is wrong about this hacienda."

The islander started. He rolled terrified eyes and crossed himself.

"The Señor Medico speaks Spanish!"

"Yes," said Dan, and added: "But, for Heaven's sake, don't tell that!"

"If I do," Luis simply answered, "they will kill you. They do not dream that you understand Spanish."

"I'm by no means sure they won't kill me anyhow, my friend, but before they do it I don't want to die of curiosity. Come, let me know what's going on here."

Luis shook his bandaged head. "I have no idea."

"You must have! Look here; you can't like this master of yours, or that infernal Fernando, either. I know you hate them both. Speak up."

The Carib could only stupidly repeat that he had no idea. His protest was so solemn—he swore by all the saints—that Dan had at last to believe him.

"Well, then," said the American, taking another tack, "help me to get that wretched fellow, Tucker, safely out of this hole, anyhow."

Luis clasped his thin hands in distress. He looked toward the closed door with a fright that was all but palpable.

"No, no! They find out everything! Besides," he added, as if to justify himself, "what is Señor Tucker to me? He is no such wonderful man, Señor Medico, and when the machinery stops, he calls out loud words that shake the earth; and he does not hesitate to shake any of us poor servants, too, who block his way. No, no! I cannot risk my life for him."

Dan ran perturbed fingers through his upright hair. He could not guess how young his intense straight figure and anxious blue eyes looked, how foolhardy his proposition of rescue sounded to his hearer, who nevertheless wanted to oblige him if the cost were not too great. All he thought was that there was need for haste and, if he were to count on this man's help, he must have the promise

of it soon. Yet here he was forced to use up precious time in argument.

"What if he has not always been kind?" Dan pleaded. "Would you have him die? He is a human being."

"So are we all." The gaunt Carib smiled grimly and made an impulsive sign of the cross as if to secure for himself a continuance of that state.

Dan took a few turns of the room. Then, stopping abruptly before Luis, he snapped out: "So you still love Don Ramon?"

The copper face took on a deeper shade. Luis' teeth set. "He is very cruel to a faithful servant. He will kill me one day. But what can I do? I am helpless! Still, I am grateful to the Señor Medico for *his* kindness. If I can safely show that I am grateful, I will gladly do so."

"And that hunchback. You love *him?*"

The swathed head on the pillow writhed. "I hate him! Always he has the better place and all because he was born with a little more intelligence than poor Luis. But no more fidelity! It is not my

fault that I know no English, that I cannot intrigue cleverly about the paper——"

Paper again! Dan thought that he had found a clew. "The *what?*"

But on that topic Luis would say no more. "I will aid you all I can, Señor Medico, but this Indian can help very little." He beat his thin chest. "He must keep his own life if that is possible!"

Dan pursued the paper theme in vain. It became clear that Luis either could not or would not enlighten him, and his doctor's instinct told him that he must not be too insistent until the Indian had rested a bit. With a submissive sigh, he at last put a hand on the Carib's shoulder.

"Well, then," said he not unkindly, "we'll let that pass. But there is another thing, and I guess you can tell me this without risking your life. In what room does the señorita lodge?"

At once Luis' whole manner changed. He sat up in bed. A mixture of eagerness and caution illuminated his face. There was no look of the savage about him now; he was the loyal, if frightened, slave.

"The Señor Medico swears he means her no harm?"

Dan vowed that he did not.

"What apartment is now hers," said the Indian in a tone that was lower than a whisper, "indeed I do not know. Of old, when I was servant to her esteemed father and her honorable mother—honorable truly, though own sister-in-law to Don Ramon—then I was privileged; but now I do not know what, beyond my commanded duties, goes on inside this *palacio*. One of these hundred rooms she must have; more than that I know not."

Dan frowned. "You say that Villeta was her mother's brother?"

"Of a surety; her mother's brother by marriage. His first wife was my dead master's sister."

"I gathered that from something he told me the other day. What I don't understand is why he, instead of the señorita, is the owner of all this."

"Nor I. I do not know. Who am I that I should understand the law? I am only a Christian! But this"—and he looked hard into Dan's eyes—"of this I am sure: Don Ramon calls himself the proprietor

of this hacienda, and it is him we must obey; but before God he has no right to these lands. That is why the Señorita Gertruda ran away and why, overtaking her, he brought her back from San Lorenzo. In San Domingo he may not marry the daughter of his wife's brother, but if he keeps her hidden, he may use—perhaps he may at last acquire—her lands."

The Carib's eyes blazed. He was, after all, a wounded man, and he had told, in broad strokes, all he knew. Dan remembered his own profession and wondered if, in any case, Luis might not yet ease the situation. Meanwhile, however, the fellow must certainly have some rest.

"There—there," he said, patting Luis' shoulder, "I'll help her and I'll help you, too. Try to sleep and forget your troubles for a little while. When you wake up, I'll have planned something. Then we'll talk. Just remember this," he concluded: "If you are at all my friend, don't speak to me when others can possibly listen. Don't even look at me as if there were any understanding between us.

And, understanding Spanish, I'll know whatever you say to them before me."

His new patient lay in an agony of terror as the doctor left him. Dan was aware of that, but he was aware, also, and with a sense of gratification, that, in spite of Luis' fear of open alliance, he had at last a friend in this house of mystery. His spirits rising, he went toward the next room. He wondered how Tucker fared. He pushed open the door softly, so as not to waken the sick man should he sleep. Crouched on the floor near the bed, his long arms folded across his flat chest, the crooked-mouthed hunchback was rocking to and fro. At sight of him now, the American's patience came to an end.

"You get out of here!" he ordered. "Don Ramon told you to keep away from this room. Go!"

The hunchback continued to rock. His lips twisted yet more stringently. He looked up at Dan with an impudent leer: "Don Ramon rides, Señor Medico. I am lord of this hacienda when he is absent. I stay!"

He began to hum softly the same tune his master

had hummed in the café in that Street of the Pink Turtledoves in Sanchez:

"My mistress is a lady—a lady—his lady;
She smiles, her lord not looking, and throws a rose to me——"

Dan hesitated. Patience had snapped, but, fortunately, his leash of caution has not yet broken. Should he use force? His strong young hands tightened in his desire to do so. He wanted to wring the dwarf's neck. Then he glanced toward Tucker. The New Englander's tired eyes conveyed a plain plea against interference.

Hot blood deluged Dan's cheeks, but he left the room with no further word. Peña's derisive laughter rang after his footsteps down the stairs.

He decided to walk about the estate and think things over. He must bring some sort of order to his mind; he must decide on some straight course of action. Stopping only for the pith helmet that Don Ramon had brought him at their point of departure, he strode to the front door and was about to pass it when he paused at sight of an armed

peon, around his waist the Domingan cattleman's machete-bearing lariat. The sight called an instant halt to his thoughts; the man was apparently on guard.

Dan, however, was not long halted. He descended the stone steps. The guard made no attempt to hinder his movements, but Dan had gone a distance of perhaps only fifty yards into the patio toward the deserted graveyard when he realized that, not many feet behind him, the peon followed with a carelessness that was nevertheless deliberate enough.

He reversed his course. This would never do! He returned to the house. Within the *palacio,* he made his way to another exit. A second man, similarly armed and lariated, stood there, expressionless, unforbidding, but obviously prepared to follow.

Again the American retreated. Here was a situation that he had in nowise anticipated. He remembered that he had determined to meet guile with guile. Very well; he shaped his lips to a nonchalant whistle and stuck his hands into his trousers pockets quite as if he had noticed nothing extraordinary. He walked from hall to empty room,

from room to empty corridor. Every window was shuttered and fastened; he was unable to open one of them. Could these precautions have been taken only against the fierceness of the tropical sun?

His heart beat none too evenly. What, after all, was to be done? Peña was doubtless still with Tucker; the armed peons, under obvious orders from the master of the house, were on watch, but seemed to confine themselves to guarding the doors of exit.

He could hardly believe that this excessive precaution was directed only against himself. Was there not some danger from without? He suddenly wondered if the glib story of evading the customs were not largely a fiction on Don Ramon's part. Inaction became beyond endurance; if he was not to explore the outside of the house, he determined to explore its interior.

An inexplicable impulse sent him back to the table at which he had breakfasted. Sitting there for a moment, he thought of Don Ramon's abrupt excursion of only an hour earlier, and to make sure of its reality he felt in his pockets for the roll of ten

bills given him then. They crinkled at his touch. Oh, they were there right enough, ten one-hundred-dollar bills!

To the left—up the stairs—ten steps—a door. Why, Villeta must have gone at least part of the way to the forbidden chapel—perhaps the whole way! Forbidden only because it was crumbling?

Dan must find the Señorita Gertruda, but he must also discover Don Ramon's secret. He would, therefore, try to repeat Don Ramon's walk.

He entered a narrower corridor than the main one, to the right. He found the staircase; brief, of worn stone, curving still more to the right. In the short hallway above he took ten steps, approximating the length he thought Villeta's legs would consume in a stride. At the tenth pace he found himself opposite a narrow oak door, pointed at the top.

For an instant, he stood still and surveyed the position. A pace farther along, on the other side of the little passageway, was a second door. He might not have measured the steps correctly. He was still hesitating when the faintest glimmer from

that second door made his glance fasten there. He wondered if it were hallucination, or if it actually did move ever so slightly and flash a thin streak of light along its opening.

If so, it moved back to place before he could blink. Nevertheless, his heart throbbed, and he had to force his mind to sane reasoning. The eyes of this dreadful house seemed everywhere watching him. It must sometimes be his own imagination, he told himself.

He meant to go on in any case. With the master away and Peña in the distant sick chamber, here seemed his sole chance to discover—whatever was to be discovered. First, he would open the pointed oak door.

He tried the handle and pushed gently. The door creaked inward, and he followed it through.

Closing it after him, he went along the inner corridor on which it opened. He realized that he must be heading straight toward the ruined chapel, and yet the chapel was level with the ground, whereas this was an upstairs corridor.

He almost ran into a second portal, very ancient,

very small, the top fastened into an equilaterally pointed architrave of stone, gray from centuries of erosion. It was locked.

Dan knew what it was. That knowledge of ecclesiastical archæology against which the Pennsylvania-Dutch lawyer of his home town had inferentially warned him—it was at last of real use. This door would lead to a compartment or gallery overlooking the chancel of the ruined chapel. Medieval noblemen in Europe had built their castles in just such a manner so that they and their families could, unseen by the more matutinal and soberly garbed serfs, attend early mass in their dressing gowns.

Quite apart from his desire to solve the mystery of the hacienda, rose now, with revived insistence, Dan's interest in a glimpse of the architectural beauties that he knew existed, in whatever ruin, beyond that barrier. The lock was old, but too firm to be shaken loose. Nevertheless, it was not rusted from disusage. The American grasped the door by its protruding hinges and lifted it with all his strength.

He was thinking fast, but his mind no longer concerned itself with suspicions of the second door in the outer corridor. During the night, when he had heard the metallic rhythm of machinery, it had come from this direction.

He pushed upward with rigid muscles. The hinges were stiff. Fruitless though the immense effort promised to be, he strained on and up. There came at last a quiver. The door yielded. He let it swing creakingly wide.

His architectural knowledge had stood him in good stead. He stepped upon a stone balcony, just such as he had imagined, and looked down at the very picture that his fancy had drawn.

The place no longer bore much of the air of a sanctuary. Weeds had invaded it; from between the tiles of the floor, purple wild flowers edged their way. The font was broken. Halfway up the apse an unusually large and very rickety confessional box leaned crazily. Sunlight made crooked dusty streaks through a small and partly broken rose window opposite the high altar, which itself was bare and deserted. But what, regardless of all his archi-

tectural interest, caught and held Dan's gaze was a two-peaked hulk of steel that towered in the aisle and seemed, in spite of the general desertion and decay, a living sacrilege on what was once a piece of holy ground. He bent far over the stone rail to look at it.

Before he could examine it, he drew up short. He was sure that he had heard a call, muffled by distance, but nevertheless a call.

It did not sound like a cry for help. Rather it reminded him of the señorita's scream of warning when, in his hammock in the jungle, the great snake was about to strangle him. Could this now be she? He had caught the phrase:

"Look out!"

In that he felt he must be mistaken. Surely no one at present in the *palacio,* except Peña and the sick man, could speak English—and Peña would be slow to give Dan a warning.

The American glanced behind him—nothing. He listened intently—no further sound. Again he bent over the rail.

Here, assuredly, was the machinery that he had heard at work, and here, he now knew, was that which had taken Villeta from the breakfast room. Don Ramon had given the impression of seeking money for Stone's fee; in reality, the planter had had that with him from the first; he left his guest —Dan saw it as with the eyes of a seer—to satisfy himself before quitting the hacienda that all was well with this desecrator of a chapel.

So much revelation vouchsafed—no more. Desecrator? There were *two* instruments. As Stone looked, they became less indistinct, but no less mysterious. Well oiled they seemed, and perfectly conditioned. What were they that they should so obsess Villeta?

Dan was nothing of a mechanic. He did not know the nature of the hulking things, but he was looking at those shining objects trying to elucidate their meaning, when something hissed beside him.

A rope! A lariat!

It just missed him.

He wheeled.

In the corridor beyond the little door that Dan had lifted from its hinges, in the act of loosing his hold of the failed lasso, stood that first armed peon, who had followed Dan from the *palacio's* front door into the open.

CHAPTER XIII

THE FORTUNE

FOR one sharp instant, as Dan wheeled upon him, the peon paused and the two men stood at gaze. The servant was a nimble-bodied black whose teeth flashed white in a surprised grin. Dan saw the hot light of the savage in that face; he read ferocity in the raggedly clad form that leaned forward ready to spring.

Without a flicker of his wide eyes, the guard reached down at last for a machete, thrust, in this instance, through the soiled sash about his middle. One blow of that frightful weapon, part knife, part cleaver, would serve any enemy.

Dan waited no attack from it. As if jumping for the ball in the decisive moment of a football game, he took a flying leap and flung himself with all his weight upon the Domingan. One fist smashed into the black face, then seized the neck; the other reached across and downward. It grasped the

weapon that the peon was already struggling to draw. The Domingan's arms relaxed and came back mightily; he had the advantage of being braced against the inner wall and now, with unexpected power, he sought to push Dan away and so gain the chance to free the machete.

They wrestled in silence. Now they were locked in a panting embrace; again the peon wrenched at his knife, and Stone strove to drag it away. Each fought with every muscle, used every ounce of strength.

A fear lest the peon should shout for help appalled Dan. Against that help, Stone would be defenseless. One thing was certain: it had not been this fellow who gave the call heard immediately before the attack. He was sure at last that that was meant for a warning to him. But he had no opportunity for conjecture with his life at stake.

Shifting his pressure ever so little, Dan shoved the upper part of the arm that grappled for the machete hard against the moving larynx of the peon. For a fraction of time the enemy's eyes bulged. If only Stone could risk a trifle more pressure! But

he dared not loosen ever so slightly his grip on the weapon.

The combatants' breath mingled in a cloud of steam. Dan could feel the other's beating on his forehead. His own came and went noisily.

With a twist the adversary lowered the upper half of his body and pushed again. The stone balcony was only two feet high; the drop from it to the floor of the chapel was a good fifteen feet. As they crashed to the floor of the balcony, neither releasing his hold, Dan realized that the peon's purpose was now to hurl him over the rail. He was handicapped because he must keep a grip on the machete and yet prevent a call for help that might summon the entire vindictive household, and the strength against which he was pitted seemed inexhaustible.

The peon lay beneath him. He had let go the machete, but Dan could not secure it, and with one free hand and an arm partially free, the black was actually lifting his opponent upward and outward—was lifting him against the rail—up—up——

One of Dan's kicking feet caught the top of the

stone fretwork. He shoved backward. He reversed their positions. Consciousness nearly left him as his head struck the balcony paving, but there was no instant to lose. With a heave that promised to be his last, he had the surprised body of the peon straddling the corrugated coping itself, where it vacillated as if doubtful which way to roll.

Dan's strength was gone, but some other force decided the issue. The Domingan, bewildered by the speed of the reversal, lying now on his back, a leg actually on each side of the rail, lost his sense of direction, rolled into mid-air, gathered momentum, flew outward and downward, and crashed headlong into the pit of the chapel, hurtling against the rickety confessional box with such force that its door was burst ajar.

Slowly and dazedly Dan struggled partially upright. He pulled himself, by the stone bars, to his knees and, still breathing hard, looked over the rail. The man who a moment since had been fighting so desperately lay very still below him.

Dan lowered himself from the balcony and dropped to the chapel floor. The Domingan was

quite unconscious, but alive. Indeed, a rapid examination showed a fractured leg and a broken arm —the arm that had held the machete—but the man was not fatally hurt.

Then came a new alarm. As he listened to the faint but certain beatings of his victim's heart, Dan heard another sound. Not a repetition of that call; this was something far more ominous. It was the sound of approaching steps along the gallery above.

Had somebody heard the noise of the Domingan's fall?

There was a narrow space behind the confessional box. Stone crept swiftly into this, lying flat, but peeped cautiously around its protecting corner. Through the narrow doorway above came the horrid form of Fernando Peña.

So he had left the patient whom he had previously refused to quit! Perhaps, rocking derisively on his haunches back there, he had come to think that, after all, Dan had better be watched. Perhaps this peon who had followed Stone had first warned Peña. But, on second consideration, that was impossible. There would not have been time. No,

Fernando must have started on some other errand; the hunchback had no inkling of the physician's presence here.

Some broken woodwork lay before Dan, a protecting screen. Prone, he could watch Fernando's every move without himself being detected.

Peña squeaked a great oath as he peered across the rail. Nimbly he crept over it and, his long knife between his teeth, jumped the sheer distance with a catlike agility that made him bounce toward the body of the peon as he alighted. He ran to it and leered at it. With a grin of diabolical pleasure, he drew back and, knife now in hand, surveyed the unconscious man.

"So, you thief, you have been caught by your own cunning!" His voice rang shrilly through the dismantled chapel. "No more sneaking tricks from you whenever the master goes away! No more treachery, my friend. I've been watching for just such treachery." He laughed aloud. "You'll be the third to die here. The rest will all learn enough to keep away—or else to stay in church forever!"

The hunchback raised his knife and struck. It came up red. He struck again.

After the second blow he had to tug to release the blade. He wiped the dripping steel on his victim's shirt, walked calmly to the chapel's main door, and opened it with a great key from his belt. A blast of hot yellow sunshine silhouetted his gargoyle shape. Then the portal swung behind him and the lock turned. He was probably gone for discreet help to bury the body and repair such damage as he had observed.

Dan was alone.

The murder had happened with a swiftness beyond prevention—a swiftness that outdistanced realization itself. From leap to blow, it had not consumed a full minute.

Blaming himself for the amazement that had kept him from his late enemy's rescue, Dan crept out of hiding. He looked at the body. The fingers were already stiffening; there was here no life now left to save.

Although horror enveloped him, Stone glanced about. He was determined to see all that could

be seen. When he had removed the door above, he thought only of the architecture of a crumbling chapel, which he felt such an impelling desire to examine. Now he did not even note its presence except as an adjunct to the worldly articles that tenanted the place.

Dan leaned heavily against the wall. An hour ago and this chapel would have fascinated him as a rare example of church architecture; he could see it at this moment only as a charnel house.

Only? His roving eyes were caught again by those twin machines. Even his technical ignorance recognized them for a pair of some sort of presses. More, they were plainly in daily or nightly activity —and yet there was no sign of sugar cane about them.

Shuddering a little, he glanced back at the dead peon, then, above his head, to the confessional box against which the body had struck. The impact had broken its glaringly modern lock. Dan looked within.

The interior fittings had long since been ripped

out. The box was almost completely filled with neatly arranged piles of American bank notes—new hundred-dollar bills, replicas of those which he at that moment carried in his pocket.

CHAPTER XIV

ANOTHER PRISONER

COUNTERFEITING—that must be Don Ramon's secret and the secret of his murderous hunchback lieutenant.

Gingerly Dan stepped across the dead peon and crowded himself within the box. Here everything was methodical. It might have been the legal storeroom of a miniature mint. To the top hill of each stack of money was pinned a slip of paper—a memorandum stating the amount piled below.

He began a sum in addition. Roughly, he figured that this was the likeness of a million, six hundred thousand dollars. Even a bit more.

He remembered what had passed in his hearing between Villeta and Fernando, the hunchback declaring that they had enough, that more would be dangerous, that printing should cease, and that, when it had ceased, Tucker must die. Dan remembered how Don Ramon stood out for a round

two millions. Stone recalled a score of hints and judged himself severely for not having joined them one to another and footed up the inevitable conclusion long ago.

And Tucker? Tucker, who was to die? What, in all this, was Josiah Tucker's rôle?

Dan thought of the weak, none-too-honest face that had looked up from the pillows in the sick room. He thought of the delicately modeled but discolored fingers. An American, too! Why, of course, the fellow had somehow been seduced from honorable but, in Tucker's mind, underpaid government employ; he was the expert necessary, whenever any technical slip occurred, to the actual making of these notes. There was just one place from which he could have come—from the manufacture of real money to the manufacture of bogus. The rogues had doubtless persuaded him with the promise of lifelong wealth, and he, at long last, lying sick in his bed at the top of the *palacio*, had come to realize that they did not mean to fulfill their promise, that they had decided to rid them-

selves of him when his work was done and so have one less to share the spoils.

A few bits of bank-note paper lay on the floor. Where were the necessary rolls of it? Oh, it was easy enough to piece the facts together now! The conspirators had just used the last of their old stock; it was a new supply that Ramon rode to-day to meet. How he was to procure the quality and texture requisite, Dan did not then inquire, but it was clear that, when he came back, the printing——

Dan stopped short. If he was caught in this chapel by Villeta, if he was caught by Fernando, his life would not be worth a button.

He ran to the door. Peña had locked it. It was heavy and firm and not to be budged by any one man's muscular strength. Dan surveyed the even sides of the chapel. The only possible exit was by the way he had come, yet there was no slightest projection whereby he could raise himself, and, jump as he might, his fingers could not grasp the bottommost opening in the rail of the balcony.

He thought of shoving something over and climb-

ing on it, but there was nothing movable that was of sufficient height. He searched in a desperation that impaired his ingenuity; he pushed, while great beads of sweat blinded him, at all the extraneous and other objects in the desecrated chancel, the high altar, the confessional box, the machinery itself. Suddenly he saw the lariat. When the peon had failed with it, he had released it entirely. It shot clear over the rail and there, unseen while Dan looked upward, it lay at his very feet on the chapel floor.

He picked it up and tried to throw it across the rail of the gallery, but he was unskilled and nervous. Once—twice—three times it flew far of the mark. Only on his fourth attempt, which he made with more calculation, did he succeed. The rope circled the rail and was so looped that the farther end hung low enough for his straining fingers to catch it. He knotted the two ends together, tested it for his weight, made it fast to the stone altar rail, and clumsily clambered up, hand over hand.

He was not light, and the lariat was old and worn. He had just grasped a balcony post well

above his head when, with a snap, the rope broke. His feet dangled for a moment; then he had them braced against the wall of the chapel and, with a great swing, pulled himself up to safety.

He staggered into the main hallway. His head reeling, his feet unsteady, he turned down that passage. As he did so, the second door, which had so caught his attention not many minutes since, opened quickly and somebody stepped out.

"You!" he gasped.

It was the Señorita Gertruda. She was dressed in a long and clinging gown of some soft white stuff, typically Spanish; but no mantilla masked her now. Her delicately carven face, dusky with the blood of Spain, was flooded by crimson; her lips shone as red as the hibiscus flower that drooped in her blue-black hair; her dark eyes glowed.

Dan's surprise at the sight of her overcame every other sensation. "It was you who called to me?" he persisted.

The answer was not in words. Her fingers closed on his shoulders. She drew him across the threshold and shut the door behind their entrance.

Her present bedroom, this; but plainly not one that had long served that purpose. No Spanish lady's bower, no pretty hangings, no feminine trifles. Here were only a bare table with a cracked mirror above it, a sixteenth-century *armario,* a narrow black iron cot, and a window strongly barred.

She let go of him and stepped back. One slim hand was tight against her breast that rose and fell.

Now speech—broken, but all clear enough—poured from her panting mouth.

"I heard a strange step in the corridor—guessed it to be yours. Earlier, I had seen my uncle ride away. The lock was old. I broke it when I saw him go. The good God gave me a strength that they thought impossible. But when I peeped out, I was not sure that it was you—and I was afraid. Then I saw what followed you and became certain. So I called."

He realized that she was astonishingly making use of his native language. There was a Spanish accent; there might be unusual construction, but the speech was his own.

"You *do* speak English!" he cried.

"Yes—yes! Did you kill him—did you kill that man?"

"Don Ramon said——"

"That I didn't speak it? I know, but he lied—he *always* lies!—but I dared not deny his words to his face. He ordered in San Lorenzo that I have no communication with any stranger; he dreaded what I might tell of his wrongs against me. When, here, he suspected that I might disobey him in secret; when he feared that you might chance to find me, he locked me in this room near the chapel, where he said he had forbidden you to go. Tell me, did you kill that man?"

"No. But he won't bother us."

She clasped her hands. "And I may trust you? I feel sure that I may trust you!"

Dan smiled a little. "In spite of what you heard me say of myself to your uncle, I guess you can trust me."

"I know it. Why did I ask? I know it! That was my reason for opening the door. It was my chance—the chance I had been waiting for ever

since he recaptured me in San Lorenzo. When I first saw you, I said: 'This man looks honorable; he looks kind.' You are an American. While my parents lived, before my uncle made me a prisoner on this hacienda for their money's sake, I went to school in your country." She had come to the climax of her appeal. She tottered toward him. "You must rescue me!"

He had wanted nothing so much as the opportunity to take her away, yet now he remembered the armed guards below stairs. Danger to himself—to Tucker—might be cheerfully defied. But danger to her?

"I must think of a plan," he said.

She seized him again. "Don't think—act! Oh, you *must* rescue me! I am quite, quite alone in the world. Don Ramon is my only relative, and he has robbed me of this, which was my parents' estate. He calls himself a guardian, but he squanders his trust for his own pleasures. There remains no one to whom I have the blood right to appeal." She raised her lovely face close to his. "Señor Stone,

for the love of the Mother of God, get me out of this prison house!"

She was penniless, she was friendless, she was beautiful. Would she, should he succeed, be any better off, alone in Santo Domingo City, alone in New York, alone anywhere, than here? He was ignorant of the jungle trails; the police sought him; at this hacienda, he was one man against a score, himself a prisoner. Nevertheless, he took both her little hands.

"I'll do it!" said he.

She laughed. There, in the desperation of her plight, she laughed as if their escape were already accomplished. The completeness of her faith in him increased his doubts of his own ability.

"I'll have to reconnoiter——"

"Then go!" she cried, pressing him backward. "Go now! There must be some opportunity as long as Don Ramon is absent. There *must* be. Luis likes me—get Luis. He will find us a way to leave the house. I should have gone after him myself had you refused. Hurry—hurry! I cannot remain here one instant more than is necessary." She was push-

ing him from the apartment as eagerly as she had drawn him into it. "Go!"

The door closed on him. He was alone in the hall. He could almost believe that her appearance there had been some dream that invaded his brain made dizzy by the fight on the balcony and the discoveries in the chapel. Resolutely, however, he pulled himself together and headed for the room in which he had left the broken-nosed Carib.

He ran—and he ran, some twenty yards away, directly into, and well nigh over, Fernando.

The hunchback's eyes were wild. As, just in time to save himself from a trampling, he sprang aside, Peña swore a crackling oath. "Where you been?"

Dan drew up short. He must stop. It would not do to excite suspicion now, but he was not going to be tyrannized over any longer.

"None of your business where I've been," he said. "Am I a convict here? And are you the warden?"

Those questions missed Fernando. He had something else to think of, and he thought of it with

malicious triumph. "I been look for you 'most everywhere. Señor Medico, you are not the wise doctor. You don' know all things. You make mistake about that Tucker get along all right now. He take spasm just this minute. You follow me immediate!"

CHAPTER XV

THE WILD CAT

DAN had to go. He owed that much to Tucker as his patient and as a fellow American to whom —whatever the sick man's crimes—he had promised more than professional help. Moreover, this, indeed, was not a propitious moment for renewing Peña's suspicions. Stone followed Fernando.

No chance to talk—to ask questions concerning what had happened—before their destination was reached, on this occasion in no roundabout way. Peña went ahead of the doctor and went at such a pace that the latter had all he could do to maintain that distance which, at the start, the guide placed between them. Small time elapsed before they entered the New Englander's room.

Tucker lay there, silent and motionless. His face was purple; his eyes stared. Dan bent over him. A look was enough.

"He is dead," said Stone.

The brief words showed nothing of the shock that the surviving American had sustained. His brain reeled, but he gazed over his shoulder, with quick intensity, at Peña.

Fernando shrugged.

"Just when," persisted Dan, "was Tucker seized with this—'*spasm?*' "

The hunchback's face was rarely communicative; it was now a perfect veil. Nevertheless, his mouth answered glibly enough: "But now, Señor Medico. It is three minutes—less. I go at once for doctor. Señor Tucker throw himself; he talk loud—and about nothing. He look black—he look red. I run at once for doctor."

A lie, of course; yet it would not be well to remind Fernando that he must have left his patient with nobody to care for him while the chapel was sought and a knife stuck into the helpless peon on the floor. Time pressed, and a renewal of open hostilities must wait until plans of escape had been perfected.

Peña peered up close to the dead man, too, as if fearful lest he might still be able to speak. "Tucker

talks! Tucker talks! Tucker talks!" Dan almost heard again the servant's protest to Don Ramon. Well, this solved one riddle that had begun to trouble him, the riddle of how to keep his promise to rescue his fellow American.

Something more immediately pertinent prompted the physician's actions. He drew gradually away, continuing to put questions about the case, and, as he did so, a course toward liberty for the girl and for himself was revealed to him. It was a desperate course. But what course would be otherwise? What other, indeed, existed? Still making formal professional queries, he maneuvered so that he stood between Peña and the open door, and close to the table on which still rested the dead man's breakfast tray. Then he spoke.

"Your master," said he, "will not be pleased. He wished Mr. Tucker to live so that he might go on with his work."

Behind Dan, Fernando Peña's dull eyes gleamed a flash of triumphant defiance.

"The good God," he said, "take Señor Tucker

because maybe the Señor Tucker he finish his work already."

There had been the marks of clutching fingers about the dead American's throat. Dan, in his swift examination, had not missed them.

"The good God," he declared, with a clarity that could not be misunderstood, "did not cause this spasm. That was the devil's work." He looked full at the hunchback and shot out his concluding words: "This man was strangled; he was murdered!"

On the instant, as if the statement were a signal, Fernando's right hand flashed to his knife, prepared to throw it, but this time Dan knew what to expect. It was with just such a contingency in view that he had backed to his present position.

With a single movement he seized and flung the breakfast tray straight into the hunchback's face, and he flung himself after it. He was too well aware of his antagonist's strength to concern himself with the ethics of the prize ring.

Peña, however, was quick to recover. He leaped into mid-air. The pair literally flew into each

other's arms, and from the impact were dashed to the floor. The knife shot away at a tangent and rattled under the bed.

Over and over they rolled, nearly crossing the room in the fury of their battle. They knocked down chairs and upset tables. Nearly everything that was within the apartment seemed to be in noisy motion. Only the dead man lay unmoved, his open eyes staring upward.

"The devil's work," Dan had called Tucker's murder, and certainly with a demoniac ferocity and a demoniac power Peña fought his accuser. Their previous battle had been nothing to this. In Fernando's diminutive and malformed body resided a frightful energy. His muscles were iron, his nerves steel. Seen at his ordinary occupations, he appeared a creature that the average man could break across his thigh; fired by his frenzy for blood, he was all but incapable of defeat, all but irresistible in murder. It was in contest against this hellish force that Stone had rashly staked the señorita's chances of safety. The dwarf fought in the full fury of a jungle beast; his wide nostrils fanned

Dan's cheeks with the flame of their breath; his yellow teeth shone in his twisted mouth.

Stone, powerful as he was, felt upon him the absolute horror of contact with deformity and knew himself to be struggling against a wild cat. Peña bit into his coat and through it till he drew blood from the shoulder. Losing his hold there, his teeth snapped in air until they fastened on the tow-colored bristle that surmounted Dan's round head. They pulled. At the same time, the hunchback kicked ruthlessly. With his long, thick, curved nails he clawed; he beat his own arms and head and chest indifferently against his enemy. He shrieked rage and exultation.

Suddenly he began to jab, with two rigid fingers, straight at the American's eyes. It was the ultimate tactic of the thug the world over. Dan was to be blinded! He tried to shout out——

Just then the entire weight of the hunchback miraculously lifted. The voice of Luis shouted encouragement. The Indian, no longer able to stand the din of the struggle, had got out of bed in the next room and rushed hither, had seen the last few

seconds of the battle, realized its import, and now tore the madman from his victim.

Stone reeled against the nearest wall. He wiped the sweat from his eyes. A shiver of nausea shook him.

"Luis——" He stammered thanks.

From the rear the Carib held squirming Peña in a wiry grip. The prisoner's feet banged back and forth angrily against Luis' shins, with a ferocity that brought a gray pallor to the Indian's battered face; but he did not loosen his clutch.

"*Déprisa!*" he called.

That appeal restored Dan. He sprang again into action.

There must be no delay. Jerking the towels from the washstand, he tied up their captive, whose piercing cries they speedily silenced with a pillow slip for a gag. They trussed him securely and fastened him tight to the footboard of the bed on which dead Tucker lay. Peña's gaze glared vengeance, but he could neither speak nor move.

"Behold him!" said Luis in his Spanish patois and

with savage satisfaction. "He cannot harm us, and only his eyes can speak."

Dan answered with significance, and no longer hesitating to use the language of the hacienda in Peña's presence: "Señor Tucker's eyes speak also!"

Luis made the sign of the cross. He tiptoed to the farther end of the room and took two candles from a mantelshelf. He stood the fallen bed table upright and on this placed one of the pair; he moved a chair to the head of the bed on the other side and put the second candle there. With steady fingers he lighted them both.

"Now," said he, "Señor Tucker will rest more quietly."

Dan watched the procedure, gathering his wits as it went on. Miraculously he had come through his two fights with no injury save that slight wound on the shoulder, but his aching brain rested itself for a moment among trivial things. He wondered how the dead man would relish Luis' attentions. Tucker had probably been reared a Congregationalist! Then he ground out cinematographically enough of the story of what had occurred in the

chapel and of the Señorita Gertruda's subsequent appeal for release.

"So," he concluded, "now that we've got Peña safe and sound, we must get the lady and ourselves out of here. But every door is guarded. How are we to do it?"

The Indian nodded toward their captive. "First of all, we must kill him."

Peña writhed.

Dan gaped at his rescuer. "We can't do that."

"Señor, he has heard your plans!"

"He's safe enough."

"Until he's found—no longer." Luis spread out his hands. "You asked me what to do, and I tell you. Come, señor; it will waste not one little minute."

Stone looked at the deformed wretch trussed against the footboard. If ever terror dwelt in human eyes, it dwelt in Fernando's now. The man was loathsome, but he was helpless.

Luis mistakenly read hesitation in Dan's face.

"*He* would have killed *you*," said the Carib.

"That was in a fight."

"He would kill you anyway, at any time, if he dared."

"Well, *I* won't kill *him* in cold blood. Get all ideas of murder out of your head and keep them out." Dan's tone was final.

Luis cast his resigned eyes heavenward.

Again Stone looked at Peña, crouched before him. The bonds were quite secure. Dan nodded to his companion to precede him from the death chamber.

"You guarded Señor Tucker alive," said Luis to the glowering Fernando; "you shall stay and guard him dead."

He stalked out of the room. Dan followed and closed the door. He locked it on the outside. There Luis again attempted an answer to the American's question.

"Señor, I do not know *how* we are to escape."

Said Dan: "That servant of Don Ramon's who followed me from the front door where he was watching! He is dead—as I told you—by this hunchback's hand, in the chapel. Did he leave his post deserted? There is a bare chance that he did."

Though Luis' dark eyes were full of a doglike

devotion to his project, he shook his head doubtfully.

"He may have been missed. They may have found him in the chapel," the Carib answered in a hopeless helplessness. "This is not a house where secrets are kept—except by Don Ramon and Fernando Peña."

"Well," Dan responded cheerfully enough, "that's our only chance and we've got to take it!"

CHAPTER XVI

READY!

LUIS, still bruised and weak from his master's manhandling, nevertheless was sufficiently recovered to be ready to follow—and to follow with an intelligence the lack of which he had bemoaned as his course in Villeta's service. He made sure that his lariat was fast about his waist; he ran lithely to a cupboard and brought forth two villainous-looking machetes. He rummaged in the buffet for bread and a bottle of wine, and from somewhere procured part of a ham which he slashed into thick slices, bundling the lot up in a cloth and fastening it at his side.

Meanwhile, Dan softly retraced his steps to that corridor down which he had so lately hurried. He went swiftly but warily, yet he met with no impediment, saw no one. So far as all this part of the great house was concerned, the usurping master's retainers, it now seemed, might have ridden away

with him that morning. Whatever the racket of the fight with Peña, it had not reached the ears of the guards below.

A few hours since, Stone would have said that each one of those many doors in the long halls of the *palacio* resembled all the others, and he would have had no little difficulty in finding the one that he sought. But not now. The girl was waiting behind it, and the fact of her unseen presence there distinguished it from its fellows. Mistake was impossible.

Although no alarm had been given by his struggle, he hardly dared to knock. He bent to the broken lock and whispered.

"Señorita!"

She was expectant. She opened the door. "Is everything prepared?" She stood there like a flower that waits the rising sun.

"Less than it ought to be—but as much as possible. How about *you?*"

Every woman is definitely of two sorts: Either she is never ready—which is frequent—or else her

celerity in anticipation outdistances that of the average man. When it is a question of dressing for the theater or a dance, she will let you wear out your shoes as they pace the reception room, but when there arises a real emergency, she is rarely found delaying—in the matter of clothes.

"Ready?" said the señorita. "But see!"

She stepped backward a pace. Dan could ill afford the time for inspection, but he ventured it.

However simply her jailers had furnished her room, they had brought her wardrobe with her and stowed it in that sixteenth-century *armario.* She was habited for the road, and her practical accouterments gave her a look absurdly youthful. He felt at first as if he were about to kidnap a child, but then his rapid gaze noted the black mantilla held in her white hands, symbol of the Spanish girl of marriageable age.

She followed his glance. Her lips curved into a twitching smile, yet her swiftly upraised arm showed, the next moment, that she realized something of the seriousness of their undertaking. Her

face was as calm as a woodland pool, but it was also resolute.

There was a brief pause.

"Am I not ready?" she asked presently.

Dan caught his breath. She was lovely, and he was about to lead her into danger.

"We've got Peña tied up, but there are guards at most of the doors, you know. They're armed, and they must have orders not to let us pass. We think we can find one way out of the house that isn't watched, only then there'll be the patio and the outer defense to negotiate."

She made a gesture that defied these things.

"That's all right," said Stone, "and of course they won't want to hurt *you* if they can avoid it, those fellows down there. It'd be only Luis and me they'd aim for; they'd just try to recapture you. Still, they're bound to be careless with their guns, and in any mix-up——"

"Let us go," said the girl.

He looked meaningly into her black eyes. "You'll take the risk?"

She bowed a full and comprehending assent.

"It's some risk, you understand," he still warned her.

The señorita advanced to him. She looked up into his face; she put a hand in both of his. "Anything—death—is better than remaining here. Let us lose no time. Let us go."

He ran by her side to the room in which he had left Luis. The Carib, though fuming from impatience, displayed his preparations with a certain degree of simple pride.

"That's good," Dan commended him.

"Take this," said Luis. He shoved a machete into Stone's fist. "First I look ahead," he added.

From the doorway Dan and Gertruda watched him as he tiptoed to the central staircase. He ran silently down it, reconnoitering. All but his head disappeared.

The girl pressed Stone's hand. "If I escape," she gratefully whispered, "I shall owe it all to you."

"And Luis," Dan corrected.

"And Luis," admitted Gertruda.

"And if you don't escape?" His voice shook at this repeated mention of her peril.

She smiled. "Then I shall be in no worse position than I was before."

"But if—if—— I mean if you're hurt?"

"You mean if I am *killed.*" Her own tone was serenity itself. "Why not speak the word? If I were armed, I could force the issue. I could make it that they should never recapture me alive. As the affair stands, well, if I am killed by mere accident, how can it matter? Here I have been a prisoner, whereas the dead that die in the Lord, they are free." She pressed his hand again. "Charge yourself with no crime against me, whatever may happen, señor. You risk much for me, and if my life is risked too, why that is at my request."

He looked down at her. Above them rose the vaulted ceiling; behind them the long corridor stretched away, silent, empty. At their feet descended the wide staircase—the way perhaps to liberty, but certainly through jeopardy. Long he looked at her and she at him.

A low whistle interrupted them. Dan's glance

shifted to the stairway. Luis was impatiently beckoning.

The American wanted to take this woman in his arms. He might never see her, after a few minutes hence, again. Surely she would forgive him if he told her now what he had come to know she meant to him. Her face was very close; her moist, red lips were parted. Surely——

Again the whistle.

Dan released her. He turned to the stairs.

"Come!" he said.

CHAPTER XVII

LUIS' MACHETE

THEY joined the Carib.

"All is safe," he whispered, and then ominously added: "So far."

The three stole down the broad stairs. Before them the main hall lay, full of shadow. Anything might be hiding here, but the tall front door was open, and there a glare of sunlight outlined an oblong of the stone floor, baking it a bright yellow. Just so the peon must have left his post, in his haste of suspicion, to follow Dan.

The intervening space was brief, but the journey across it seemed to the fugitives to consume an interminable period. No guards, however, leaped from the darkness; no alarm shattered the stillness of the house. A few yards from that patch of yellow light, Luis gestured a command to pause.

Himself, he ran nimbly forward, stopped, and then, an inch at a time, thrust his head beyond

the threshold. They saw him turn this way and that. They waited for a while breathless.

Would there be somebody in the patio? There must be! Stone felt more keenly than ever the folly of this attempt. They could not expect all the jailers of the hacienda to be as fast asleep by day as those warders spellbound by the good fairy when Prince Charming rescues his princess from the ogre's castle in the fairy tale.

"What time is it?" asked Gertruda.

Dan glanced at her in something close to annoyance. How could the hour matter? He wondered at the irrelevancy of this question from a woman who had lately shown herself so practical.

"Time?" he repeated.

"Yes. What time——"

The Carib's swathed head had been drawn back. It turned its broken nose in their direction. "Again all safe."

The girl sighed relief. "I thought so. It is the lucky hour of the siesta."

"You mean they're napping?" asked the incredulous Dan.

"But of course, all except the guards, and everybody thinks this door guarded. They have all had a little bread and a great deal of wine, the peons, and so they now repose themselves. It is their right. It is the one right that they have; they could not live without it."

Inwardly, Stone upbraided himself for his criticism of her. He was glad, even at such a crisis, that he had kept it silent.

"Hurry!" said Luis.

The admonition was unnecessary. They sped after him.

Not a creature was visible as they began to descend the widening flight of steps to the patio. Except for the ever-moving fernlike branches of a Pride of India tree in the farthest corner, scarce a leaf stirred in the noonday heat. Assured that his fellow was on duty somewhere just beyond the *palacio's* open door, a single guard sat asleep with his back against the trunk of a coconut palm. Don Ramon had reasonably built his reliance on the interior warders, and every one of the outside sen-

tinels now relied, in tropical relaxation, upon the jungle as the best of secondary prison walls.

"He sleeps sound, that one," grinned Luis.

"But we won't run any unnecessary risks," Dan said. "Walk softly!"

They moved with caution down the top steps. Their footfalls roused no echoes.

"Muerte al traidor!"

A shriek. A shriek of terror, but a shriek as well—so those words seemed to Stone—admonitory. From inside the house it came, from the very corridor that still yawned but a few feet behind and above the escaping prisoners, a raucous voice that shattered the lazy quiet with this cry of haste and alarm. It was as if the doorway itself vomited the shout.

Dan wheeled. Nothing to be seen.

He turned again. He began to drag the girl down the steps for a frantic dash onward. All this in the smallest flash of time. As he laid hold of her, she looked up and smiled. She incredibly smiled!

"What——" began Stone.

"It was Pedro," said Luis and laid a reassuring hand on the American's arm.

"Pedro?"

"The parrot," explained Gertruda, "my uncle's parrot."

Dan drew a long breath, but though he arrested his pace, he was not wholly appeased. "It doesn't matter what it is if it wakens that guard."

It did not waken the guard, however. The dozing sentinel, long familiar with the bird's noises, never budged from his repose at the foot of the palm.

The trio of fugitives stood still to convince themselves. The cry was not repeated. The tropical quiet had returned, the noon's suspense of all perceptible motion monotonously continued.

"Phew!" gasped Dan.

Straight down on their heads poured the molten sun. The courtyard clay, pounded hard by the bare feet of one generation of peons after another, was set aglow with the heat until it looked like a bed of living coal. The dancing air was incandescent; it burned the eyes. From human interfer-

ence the fugitives might be immediately safe in the patio, but here and everywhere else where there was no shade, there lurked the deadly menace of the skies.

"We can't stand this," Stone continued. "We'll never get anywhere on foot. We've got to get horses somehow." He addressed Luis.

The Carib nodded. "But of a certainty, señor."

He led them by a devious way around the house. They left the cleared space for a grateful shade, a slim path that plunged among rioting convolvulus, a tangle of spice and lemon trees.

"What's this?" asked Dan.

It was a rear approach to the hacienda's stables. Presently he saw their roofs just topping the foliage. The low buildings appeared to be deserted.

"Wait," said Luis, and ran nimbly ahead.

They saw him creep into the stables by a back door. Dan drew Gertruda among the deepest shadows.

"If they're not empty——"

"They will be."

"But we haven't a minute to spare!"

The siesta concluded, Peña was sure soon to be missed and searched for by his fearful but faithful underlings. He would be found and released; pursuit would result, inevitably and swiftly. Dan and the girl waited in anxious silence, Gertruda outwardly calm but with a vivid flush upon her cheeks, her companion frankly chafing.

Two minutes passed—and no sound came from the stables.

Five minutes—the pawing of animals disturbed.

The rattle of harness—sounds, but no sign.

Then the rear door reopened. Luis appeared at last. He was mounted and drew two saddled horses after him, their bridles in his right hand.

"I have left nothing but mules in the stalls," he said.

Almost at once, the party was riding slowly down the neglected avenue toward the hacienda's wall. Hurry was as yet dangerous, but as long as they moved at a walk the overgrown roadway deadened all sound of hoofs.

"The gate will be locked," said Dan. "How are we going to manage that?"

The Carib smiled grimly. "Let me ride ahead," said he. "The gate is my business."

He dispatched it summarily. As they drew near, they saw the keeper sprawled under a clump of oleanders. Luis leaped from his horse, picked up a stone, vaulted back into saddle and then threw his missile.

When Columbus found the Caribs, they were experts with the sling, and marksmanship is one of the few talents that centuries of degeneration have left them. That stone took the sleeping man full in the face. It was small and lightly thrown, but it wakened him.

He sat erect and rubbed his eyes. ,

"Halt!" ordered Luis to his little company.

They all drew rein.

The gatekeeper blinked. He looked up. He looked at the gate. Then, still in quest of the source of the projectile, he glanced up the drive.

He saw them. He was an ugly fellow with a heavy scowl and an unduly large mouth. The stone had cut him slightly between the eye, and

a trickle of blood ran down his nose. He sprang to his feet and whipped out a revolver.

Instantly, Luis clapped heels to his horse. The animal bounded forward. Before the weapon was fired, the Carib was upon its owner.

"Take this medicine!" he laughed. His machete flashed. *"Una cucharada tres veces al dia!"*

The keeper had leaped aside, but not far enough. The machete descended.

It was a brief but nasty business. The girl, realizing something of what was coming, had hidden her eyes. Even Stone did not care to look too closely. Luis searched the body and found what he sought—a key.

The escaping prisoners took the road to the village.

CHAPTER XVIII

REJECTED SACRIFICE

ONE horror was past, but even yet they dared not ride too rapidly, for the hamlet lay close at hand. It was scarcely likely that Don Ramon would have taken any of its inhabitants into his full confidence; still, Stone thought that there might be some one there who was intimate enough with the planter to be rendered doubtful by the unwonted spectacle of a party riding away from the hacienda in evident hurry. When Peña came, he would have nothing to lose by speed.

"Phew!"

Dan flicked the sweat from his forehead and wiped first one hand and then the other on a trouser leg. The second hand made those ten notes in his pocket crinkle significantly. He was a double fugitive, and he was both charged with killing and with having possession of counterfeit money.

During the succeeding moment's disgust, his impulse was to throw the false paper away, but second thought restrained him. Perhaps this evidence of Don Ramon's nefarious business, an offense against a friendly nation, would secure its holder a readier hearing by the Domingan authorities.

For Stone had resolved upon self-sacrifice. The girl, probably ignorant of law, and intent only on their escape from the hacienda's dangers, did not guess the full extent of his personal peril and must never be aware, until too late to prevent it, of the full scope of his proposed immolation, lest she jeopardize—as, knowing in time, she infallibly would—all of her safety for some degree of his. Gertruda's thoughts had to be kept from his own plight, because he had definitely decided to risk himself with the police in order to secure her from her embezzling uncle.

His plan was plain, and if they could outdistance pursuit long enough, its execution ought to be simple. Luis must guide them by the briefest way to freedom from Peña's certain pursuit—the briefest way consistent with an avoidance of

encountering the homeward-bound Villeta. Once safe from the chase, or reasonably sure not to be overtaken and brought back before reaching the officers of the law closest within call, the course would be laid direct to the Domingan capital. There he would tell Gertruda's story to the police—since his description had doubtless been sent out broadcast and the lookouts were everywhere—this would be tantamount to surrendering himself for the killing of Goldthwaite.

He looked at the girl. She wore the mantilla, but had forgotten to draw it lower than her hair. Her face was resolute, her chin held high; her black eyes shone. She was worth it!

The horses were familiar with this portion of their route. At an easy jog, they threaded their way through the garbage and refuse of the single street. Most of the inhabitants were, however, still sleeping heavily; only a few barefoot and half-clothed native children, some dark with Indian blood, more dark from the sun, stared at the cavalcade.

Dan turned in his saddle to the Carib. "Will they

carry any warning of our escape to the hacienda?" He suspected spies everywhere.

Luis was less dubious. "Why should they?"

"They'll tell their parents that they've seen the señorita. They don't see her often nowadays, I suppose."

"They would no more dare to wake their fathers than I should dare to wake a sleeping watchdog, señor. And if they did, what do those fathers know? Peña's wife lives *beyond* here. The danger lies not here. The danger will come when these children are questioned by Peña. They will point out our way to him; *he* will not have to ride through the pueblo slowly. If the hacienda servants had not Fernando, they would be helpless. If the señor had only let me kill him——"

Dan interrupted: "Never mind that. There's probably a warrant out for me, but I'm not up to first-degree murder even yet."

The Carib was pushing ahead rapidly, but Stone stayed him, though the village assumed a serpentine length that he found intolerable. The palm-thatched

cabins panted in the heat; flies and mosquitoes lazily buzzed outside the motionless jalousies. Mother goats, in the cool of the doorways, would summon their overly energetic kids from danger under the horses' hoofs.

It was finished at last. Quit of the village, Luis turned them into a jungle trail, along which they proceeded with what speed it permitted, the fear of pursuit always close behind them, the dread of they knew not what interference ahead.

It was still possible for Dan to ride abreast of the girl, and he wanted to remain close to her as long as he could. Leave her he soon must, never to return—unless some miracle should clear his name. He thanked God that he had kept silent his love for her; he was even glad that he had not burdened her with any knowledge of the rôle she played in the heart of a man whom the world must regard and treat as a criminal, but he did desire her proximity as long as it was attainable, and he therefore kept close to her.

She had not spoken for some time. Dan wondered whether her thoughts were entirely occupied

with the death of the gateman, yet he respected her reticence. Now, suddenly, she looked up, and his curiosity was almost immediately satisfied.

"What," she asked in her precise English, "is to be our destination?"

He tried to smile. "Anywhere that Don Ramon is least likely to look. That's up to Luis; he knows the country."

"But ultimately?" Her gaze was very steady.

Stone's, generally so frank, shifted. "I don't know."

"You must have some plan."

"There wasn't much time for planning. You told me to act and not think."

"We cannot go on like this forever."

As a high-school lad, he had read and loved Browning's "Last Ride Together." Now that phrase of hers set the poem's concluding lines to ringing in his head:

> What if heaven be that, fair and strong
> At life's best, with our eyes upturned
> Whither life's flower is first discerned,
> We, fixed so, ever should so abide?

What if we still ride on, we two,
With life forever old yet new,
Changed not in kind, but in degree,
The instant made eternity—
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, forever ride?

He almost quoted the words, but he checked himself and stammered:

"I—we—I mean to get you to some reliable authority or other, somebody who'll look after your rights, get your fortune out of your uncle's fingers."

"I do not think that he has left much of it," she said; "but even if he has, I prefer only that we escape from this island."

He felt her cool eyes reading his mind, but he made one more attempt at dissimulation. "Well, I hope to make your escape possible and to get your rights for you, too."

She spoke quietly: "Señor, the police are seeking you. If you go to the authorities on my behalf, you will be giving yourself up to them. It should go without saying that I will not permit such a sacrifice for any fortune whatever."

The blood mounted to Dan's temples. Embarrassment choked him, but remonstrance struggled against it in his throat. What, however, would have been the issue he was never to know, for at that moment the Carib, riding ahead, flung up a warning hand.

"Listen!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE VAGABOND.

THE trail had opened upon a small, natural clearing in the jungle's heart. It was walled by sour-orange trees and giant ferns. Ropes of vines hung, snakelike, from surrounding boughs. No spot could have seemed less usually frequented by humankind. The heavy carpet of moss muffled the sound of the traveler's progress, and no other sound reached Dan's atentive ears.

"Listen!" repeated Luis. He drew in his horse.

Gertrude's mount and Stone's stopped still. To the American the perfect silence seemed continuous.

"What's wrong?" he inquired, yet he spoke below his breath. "I'm listening, all right, but there's not anything to hear."

"There is," said Luis.

Dan looked inquiringly at the girl.

She shook her head. "I don't——" she began.

Luis gestured a command that all talk cease,

and then, sure enough, from somewhere ahead, from somewhere along the trail as it cut again into the jungle at the clearing's farther side, there came the crackle of breaking twigs.

The girl gasped: "My uncle?"

"Your uncle," said Luis, "does not go afoot."

"Somebody from the hacienda?" whispered Dan.

Luis shook his head. "There is no trail there that connects with this one."

"Shall we go on?"

"No. Wait and see." The Indian drew his already stained machete.

"Don't use that!" cried Gertruda.

Stone restrained her.

Twigs crackled again. The footsteps were distinctly audible now. They drew nearer. Then the escaping trio saw, approaching them, a vagabond pedestrian.

On such a road at such a time even a beggar proved fit subject for mistrust. This one, as he paused at sight of the attentive group and gazed straight into Dan's blue eyes, was ragged beyond

anything previously believable to Stone; beyond things believable the fellow was dirty, and beyond things believable he was known and knew.

"Hoagland!" cried Dan.

Luis looked at him. Was this friend or foe?

Stone could not answer with words. He was half stupefied by the recognition. For an insane instant his instinct of self-preservation clamored for precipitate flight. Could Hoagland have followed him from the coast? How could he know of that roundabout journey to the hacienda? Dan pictured the prosperous-looking fellow standing in the sheltered doorway of Sanchez and thence tracking Don Ramon as the planter went to buy clothes and fill prescriptions—the prescriptions that had so nearly saved Tucker's life. Hoagland would probably like to put Dan in the hands of justice, but a surrender on the murder charge was part of Stone's present enterprise, and here might be, at all events, an ally against the certainly soon-following Peña. The voyager of the *Hawk* was at least a fellow countryman. Dan could speak frankly to

him and trust to his national sense of fair play. A motion told the Carib to lower his weapon.

Dirt was caked upon the erstwhile Hoagland's cheeks, and sweat ran through it in muddy gutters. He smiled. Was that the smile of a successful pursuer? Dan thought so, but before Stone could speak the newcomer demanded:

"What's all this? A joy ride?"

"It's no joke," said Dan, "and we haven't got a minute to spare. If you were looking for me—well, I'm here, and it won't be you I'll run away from." He spoke rapidly. "Turn around. Put a hand on my bridle if you like. We've got to hurry. If you'll walk as fast as you can beside me, I'll tell you all about it. We're sure to be followed soon. You," he broke out, "you must help—and you will if you're a good American."

Hoagland's eyes were keen. "I'm an American, all right," said he. "As to whether I'm a good one or not, opinions differ."

"Then come along."

The *Hawk's* passenger took off his broad-brimmed native straw hat, disclosing to Dan, in a bow

toward Gertruda, the once familiar thatch of thin hair.

"I think——"

"No introductions now," snapped Stone, and as the march was resumed, he continued: "You'll want to know first about what I did on that ship, and, anyhow, what I did there is what got me into this new mess. Well, then——"

But again Luis interrupted, and again it was with a command to listen that he did so. He reached from his saddle and touched Dan's arm.

"Hush!"

This time it came from behind them, from that stretch of the trail over which they had just passed, and this time it was immediately unmistakable. Nothing afoot. Mounted men—mounted men advancing as rapidly as the jungle track allowed. It was the pursuit at last.

"There they are!" said Dan.

"They?" asked Hoagland. "Who?"

There was no use in attempting to run away any farther; since a battle there must be, it had

better be here. Stone flung a rapid and sketchy explanation to his latest recruit:

"When you were looking for me in Sanchez, you followed a big man in white—a planter—name's Villeta. He's a crook—all sorts. Robbed his niece —this girl here. I got her away. Now his people are trying to get her back."

As he spoke, Dan was looking to right and left. His party had not yet crossed the clearing; but he could see that the green walls of the open space were everywhere backed by a dense mangrove swamp, its depths doubtless breathing poison, its surface promising, at a short distance, engulfment to any trespasser. Gertruda might hide safely on its outskirts for a few minutes, abiding the issue of the now certain conflict, but the rest of them must stand their ground.

Stone ordered the girl five paces—and no more —into the jungle. She reluctantly obeyed. The sounds of pursuit drew still nearer.

"Got a gun?" he inquired of his fellow American.

Hoagland nodded.

"Then draw off to the left there and use it from the flank. We haven't anything but machetes; we'll have to go to it hand in hand. If they get us two, you try to draw them after you. Break for the swamp on the opposite side from where the señorita is."

He translated, for the Carib's benefit. His own mount he pushed to the extreme edge of the open space, covering the girl's retreat, and he bade Luis follow him there. That last order was no sooner executed than the pursuers were upon them.

Two—four—eight—ten—the enemy, muleback, swarmed into the clearing. Twelve! A successful resistance was probably as impossible as further retreat. Nothing to do but fight it out, anyhow! They were coming without pause straight at their quarry; at their head and well in advance of the others, the liberated hunchback, perched on his saddle like a big doll, waved an automatic pistol and shrieked with triumph.

Dan raised his machete. His nearer ally also made ready to strike.

Peña was now not a yard distant from Luis,

upon Stone's right. The dwarf's wild eyes were all for that deserter.

"*Traidor!*" yelled Fernando.

Another pound forward. The Carib struck, but struck too late. Peña, thrusting his pistol directly against the Indian's broken nose, fired.

Luis flung up his arms. He fell from his horse, dead.

Dan prodded his own mount toward the hunchback. As he did so, there came a volley of shots and a final rush from Fernando's henchmen. He thought that, out of the corner of an eye, he saw Hoagland reel. The gang clashed all around; they closed in. Stone's machete was straightway stricken from his grasp.

Of course the fugitives had been hopelessly outnumbered. Stone caught sight of three peons heading into the swamp beside him; their trained eyes had, even in the high heat of warfare, caught some telltale sign. They were going to recapture Gertruda. Well, there remained the splendid opportunity of dying barehanded in her defense. He

reined his horse about, broke through his nearest enemies and rode at the trio.

And then an incredible thing happened. Some one jumped at him from behind. Before he could resist, his arms were pinioned to his sides and a voice—Hoagland's voice—was shouting in easy Spanish to Peña:

"If this is the man you're after, I've got him—only I think I ought to have a little reward for turning him over to you!"

CHAPTER XX

DOUBLE-CROSSED

UNDER the high window of Dan's room a peon stood erect—or as erect as a peon can stand—a carbine resting in the crook of his arm. In the hall outside the locked door of that same apartment a pair of servants were on guard, and they carried automatics. Within, Dan sat, his aching head in his hands, his sick thoughts whirling dizzily from the treachery of Hoagland to the possible fate of the señorita.

A key grated admonishingly. Swaggering like a hand-organ monkey, the hunchback marched in. His eyes were dull once more, and he smiled, but not even when he intended instant murder had he betrayed more malice.

"The señor that captured you was hurt at the start of our little scuffle," he said. "We owe him the reward of good care. You have not shown yourself a successful doctor with our Señor Tucker,

but you are all that we have—and so you are to attend this new patient."

His tone was a grating insult, his speech Spanish. Dan stared at him impassively.

"Oh," Peña mocked, "you can understand me well enough. I know it, for I heard you give orders to Luis in the dead room!"

Stone bit his lip; but after all, these minor discoveries mattered nothing now.

"How was he hurt?" he inquired in Fernando's own language.

"We do not know. We fear some internal injury. That, it is your business to discover—if you have the requisite skill."

Not Dan's business, perhaps, but surely his unpleasant duty. He rose.

"Look here," he said, "I'm going to attend to this fellow—not because I want to, for he double-crossed me, and not because you order it, for I'm past being afraid of you or anybody in the whole hacienda. You've got me and you'll do your worst to me, whatever *I* do. No, I'm going to treat your friend because, though I couldn't pre-

vent your killing Tucker, I'm enough of a doctor never to refuse help. Only, don't you think I deserve a fee?" He resolutely bridled his pride. "Can't you pay for my services with a little scrap or so of information?"

Peña's crooked smile more than ever distorted his yellow face. Most of us judge our fellows by the sole standard of ourselves; this creature could not conceive of a prisoner in Dan's position as being anxious about any life except his own.

"You want to know what is going to happen to you?" he asked; and he answered the question: "What will happen is almost certain, but perfect certainty awaits the master's return."

"I don't give a *dominicano* what happens—to me," said Dan. "I want to know something about the Señorita Gertruda."

He hated to mention her name in such a presence and might, indeed, have spared his pains. Fernando merely smiled the more—and the more evilly.

"That also awaits the master's word. Come now to your new sufferer. You are to employ your best skill with him, Señor Medico, for he is

the last patient you will ever have. There is no need of physicians in heaven!"

With guards falling in before and behind, the hunchback conducted his prisoner to the room in which the New Englander had met his violent end. Any effort toward escape would have been futile, and unless it could help the señorita—which no effort now could do—Stone cared little enough to make one. Peña opened the fatal door.

Poor Tucker's body had been removed and Hoagland lay on the bed—probably between the very sheets that had recently covered the dead man. All signs of disturbance were, however, removed and all signs funereal—the snuffed candles were restored to their usual place on the mantelshelf.

Dan, disgust in every movement, approached the injured man. Whatever the hurt incurred by the *Hawk's* passenger, it seemed to be a severe one. There was no blood visible, but he lay with the relaxation of utter exhaustion. Stone studied the not ill-natured features under the thin mat of hair. It was hard to believe such a man a double dealer. Double dealer he had, however, patently proved him-

self, and the doctor could not curb a shudder of aversion.

Standing close beside him, Peña saw it. "You hate this man now?" he smiled. It was very pleasant to impose the unwelcome task.

"I'll do my best for him," said Dan shortly.

"Ah," laughed Fernando, "I know you will—*because* you hate him! Thus it is with you Americans. The more you dislike a work, the more you feel you should do it. Trust *you;* you'll go through with it. I have always heard so." He rubbed his hands together. "Well, then, having a multitude of preparations to make for my master, I shall not take the joy of watching you. Do you think the case serious?"

"I'm no wizard," Dan mumbled. "I can't tell anything at the first glance."

"So?" said Peña. "Remember, your last patient! Make a fine job. You will have plenty of time. For double care of you, I shall lock the door, but there will be a guard outside of it with a key. Should you require anything, call. Do not be modest of your knowledge of our language; your

excellent Spanish will be well understood, never fear, Señor Medico."

He bowed with apish extravagance and impish irony. Dan could almost have found it in his heart to crush the poisonous creature as one might grind a venomous toad beneath one's boot heel.

Fernando left the room. The door was fastened.

Then Stone shook off his loathing. He returned perplexedly to the injured man.

Hoagland lay with closed eyes. The sheet was now slightly drawn back, and it revealed the fact that he was fully clothed. One touch showed that he had no fever, another discovered the pulse to be regular. Dan stripped off the patient's coat, the better to examine for internal injuries. As he did so, he saw that something protruded slightly from an inner pocket. It was a small, flat leather case.

Stone relentlessly opened it. Up at him, from under a glazed surface, there stared the certified information that Martin Patrick Hoagland was a special agent of the division of secret service, treasury department, U. S. A.

"Eh?"

That grunt of stupefaction was involuntary. Dan turned upon his patient.

Hoagland was grinning broadly. He was even administering to his physician the wholesome medicine of a slow wink.

"In Heaven's name," began Stone, "what's the meaning of——"

"That dwarf must be safe downstairs by now," Hoagland cut in with a quick whisper. "I'm all right, of course. And don't take what I did to you too seriously." His voice carried no farther than Stone's straining ears.

Dan was still gasping. "Who are you?"

"You've read that card."

"Yes, but then why did you do—what you did? And what are you doing here in Santo Domingo?"

"Had to get inside this house somehow—some way that wouldn't excite suspicion. Any means were fair, in the circumstances. Besides, they had us dead to rights out there in the jungle. I couldn't help you, fighting four to one and everything in their favor."

"You might have told me——"

"There wasn't time. Besides, I wasn't sure of you and didn't know I'd need you even if you were O. K. And then, you'll kindly remember, you wanted to do the talking, and it was all about the little lady and yourself. No; I had my special job on hand. Why, it was on account of that—since you ask it and I'll need you now—that I came to the island. You said this Ramon was all kinds of a crook. Well——"

A light broke on Dan. "I know. I found it out."

"I was right about you just now. You're the boy I'll need. Tell me what you want."

"They are printing counterfeit U. S. money."

"Well," resumed Hoagland, "I got on the trail of some bank-note paper back home. It was to be shipped by the *Hawk,* and the *Hawk* was really booked for San Lorenzo, no matter what they said and no matter how much condensed milk they meant to take to other places later. I don't know how deep Goldthwaite and his cross-eyed Johnson were in the thing—don't know how much they knew—but I had a couple of men on the mate's track in Brooklyn, and he didn't look good to them.

Down here, I found out that Ramon had to leave the landing of the paper and the first two land hauls to an agent—between stumbling over you and that runaway niece that he'd followed—oh, the Sanchez café keeper knew a little and talked more, *Doctor Gurney!* Why, Villeta had his hands full." Hoagland groaned: "And then *I* had *mine* full. Gee, but I'm stiff! I rode a mule till I killed it."

"But you can't do anything in this house!" cried Dan, wildly waving the leathern case. "They'll only kill *you,* too. They've killed a lot already—and I'm next! I don't care about myself; it's the girl I'm thinking of. I was on my way to give myself up for the Goldthwaite killing——"

Hoagland lifted his thin eyebrows. "Did you really think you did for that pirate?"

Dan cried out.

Hoagland put a cautioning finger to his lips. "Can the noise, sonny, and never mind the details. Goldwaithe's as good as ever by now—or as bad—more's the pity. And what's more than *that,* your new boss knew it was so, or soon would be, when he hired you!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE TREASURY NOTES

THE mission of Martin P. Hoagland to Santo Domingo had its origin in the greatest shock ever received by certain officials not unconnected with the currency of the United States of America. As the secret-service operative told it to his pseudo-physician, there in the fortress of Don Ramon Villeta, the history was shorn until its remaining details constituted the barest statement of fact. What, however, had happened was a clash between temperament and system.

Behind the high walls that protect the Government Bureau of Engraving and Printing in Washington, an intricate regimen rules. Laws as stringent as ever those of Draco decree each movement of each employee for each second of his eight-hour day. Among the money printers everybody is inspected; every part of his job is checked up every minute. System commands it and system is supreme

Now, concerning system, two things are axiomatic. First, the better the system, the fewer the permitted exceptions; next, when an exception is forced upon a system, from the outside, then, the better the system, the worse the confusion. With the former of these axioms, John H. Farley, in charge of the bureau, had been long acquainted. He had just passed his fifty-third birthday when the latter bumped into him.

That year, the second of January, fell on a Tuesday and the bureau opened for business at nine a. m. When he had closed up shop at noon on Saturday, December 30th, Farley, lean and long, looked back on the thus concluded year with all the satisfaction of which his cautious nature was capable. This hook-nosed man with the worried air was head of the division that actually produces America's paper money; he was also a stickler for peace and quiet, and he had made good.

No damaged plates, a minimum of reprimands to employees, scarcely any ink troubles, less than ever the usual number of dismissals, 72.5 per cent of

first printings approved on initial inspection, and all deliveries on time—a commendable achievement. He could recall but one eruptive half hour, and that had been due only to his handsome, but mature, stenographer:

"I—I don't see why I shouldn't be assistant, instead of their running Mr. Dodd over my head!"

She had grown from an awkward girl into a painstaking woman at the bureau, but she had yet to appreciate the fine ideal of the civil service board.

"I've been here for years," she sobbed. "I know the place inside out and I'm a lot more capable than Mr. Dodd is, but of course I'm only a woman, and all he has to do is pass an examination!"

A woman. Somehow, except during one condescending dinner at her boarding house, Farley had seldom before so considered her. He wondered why, in spite of her undeniable good looks, she had always seemed as permanent a fixture of this office as its very vaults; it must be because she was so efficient. He debated whether, being a woman, she had suppressed the more painful

prong of her grievance; whether her keen glance had seen that sentence relating to her in the annual character report that he submitted to the secret service:

Greene, Cecilia: pvt. Secy: 10 yrs. in govt. employ; faithful, efficient, incorruptible, will never marry.

On this morning of January 2d, however, Farley shrugged the doubt away. His desk was open and in order, and, as far as her work was concerned, Miss Greene was her conscientious self again.

Farley touched a couple of his desk bells. From opposite doorways two men appeared. Luther Lemmell, long in the service, was little and fussy. Grantley Dodd was a bare thirty-five, broad and prosperous looking, with a gold chain conspicuously stretched across the curve of his already expansive waistline.

"We're going to begin the New Year by printing the first of the hundred-dollar Fillmore heads." Farley stroked his jawbone between thumb and forefinger. "The engravers made a time record with their part of the job. The plates reached

us"—he consulted an office memorandum—"at eleven twenty on Saturday. Now we're going to beat the engravers. You gentlemen locked the plates in the safe"—again he consulted the memorandum—"at eleven twenty-five. They'll come out right now at—let's see—nine ten. They'll be on the presses in ten minutes—I've notified Gough about the make-ready—and we'll have our first official printing under way at nine thirty sharp. Mr. Lemmell, will you please start the combination?"

It was one of the laws of the great system that only three persons should have knowledge of a safe's combination; one, Farley himself, holding the entire key; the others, two trusted employees—in this case Messrs. Lemmell and Dodd—who guarded one half apiece. At unexpected moments, the combination was changed. The two men left the quiet office, and Mr. Farley turned to Cecilia Greene and began the dictation of routine instructions.

He did not get far. Miss Greene was seated on the edge of the desk chair beside him, her pencil

poised in air awaiting his sixth sentence, when Dodd and Lemmell rushed back.

"They're gone!"

Farley leaped to his feet. Miss Greene, pencil and notebook still in hand, leaped to hers.

"Gone?" echoed Farley. "You mean the Fillmore plates are not in the safe where you put them?"

Dodd's large hands trembled; Lemmell nodded convulsively. Farley strode to the door.

"Close the building!" Farley ordered his two assistants. "Get the secret service on the phone—Chief Boyle—then come back to the vault. I must make sure."

Miss Greene followed close at his heels. A glance over his shoulder revealed her interrogative eyes.

"Yes, yes, come along," said he. In the money factory everything is done more safely in pairs.

The room to which they went was literally a steel room, and in their speed thither they brushed with no nod of recognition past the guard at its door. He was an old government servant, far above suspicion in this place where every one was

more or less suspect; but—what was of greater weight—he would be the last man to know the combination of the big safe within. There was now no use in questioning him. Inside, however, the thick door of that safe stood open just as Lemmell and Dodd had left it in their frantic haste to communicate the news.

"Bad, bad!" Farley groaned at this evidence of their carelessness. He and Miss Greene ran directly to the yawning safe.

"They were to put them here—in this main compartment," said Farley, touching the indicated shelf.

His secretary had been far too long in the bureau not to be jealous of its honor. She peered this way and that with nervous, searching eyes intent upon a clew. The room was as vaultlike as always, a series of steel walls, steel compartments, steel locks. It was not to be believed that anything could have been forcibly tampered with. Miss Greene looked toward the single entrance door; it was of course ajar, but the guard, his back scrupulously to them, leaned beside it, a barricade against intrusion.

Then, suddenly, within the safe itself, something out of the ordinary must have caught the secretary's scrutiny, for, while her chief leaned forward to the ravished shelf, she raised herself quickly to her tiptoes and reached far up over his bent back. From a high pigeonhole she pulled down a heavy package.

"Mr. Farley!" she gasped.

Before he gathered her meaning, Lemmell and Dodd pushed past the guard.

"Chief Boyle is on the phone now, sir," said Lemmell. "Will you speak to——"

He stopped. Both newcomers stared at a small paper-wrapped parcel that lay in Miss Greene's outstretched hands. She stood there, pale and swaying a little from the excitement of it.

"They're the Fillmore plates, all right," cried the quickly exultant Dodd. "I know the shape——"

"And I remember the wrapping paper," said Lemmell.

Farley had regained a degree of self-control. "You put them in the main compartment, didn't you?"

"Yes, yes!" declared both Dodd and Lemmell vigorously.

Miss Greene raised her perfect eyebrows: "They were on the *upper* shelf. Oh, they *are* the Fillmore head, aren't they?"

Farley seized them and tore off the cover. "Of course they are!" He was saved. "And yet——"

"And yet," blurted Dodd, "that *isn't* where we put them!"

"No, sir," Lemmell insisted. "We put them in the main compartment—just where you told us to, and just where you were looking."

"Are you both certain? You might be mistaken. They were on that upper shelf when we found them. Would you both swear you put them in the main compartment?" With his worried frown he scanned the two men's faces.

"I remember perfectly," said Dodd, unabashed.

"I'd swear to it," declared Lemmell imperturbably.

Miss Greene looked at Farley as if for a decision, but before he could speak Dodd's hearty voice cut in.

"Well, anyway, they're found! We should worry. The incident's over."

"Is it?" pondered his superior. "I wonder!"

That was the prelude to Hoagland's narrative as told to Dan at the *palacio.* This is what followed:

One morning, a little more than a month previous to Dan's desertion from the S. S. *Hawk,* a man who had never heard of young Stone, walked, as of right, into Mr. Farley's private office.

He was a large man with flat, red hair and a short but bristling red mustache. Importance declared itself even in the details of his well-cared-for clothes, which were all of one shade or another of brown. It spoke in his brown derby, his brown-braided coat, his brown-braided trousers. It shone in the polish of his neat tan shoes and was impressively evident in a tiny brown neckcloth meticulously tied.

"Mr. Boyle," said Farley, nervously pacing the floor, "you called me an alarmist when I sent for you about those Fillmore plates, and then found

them within five minutes. That was on January 2d. It's now only March 1st—and look here."

Between trembling fingers he held out two one-hundred-dollar bills to the chief of the secret service. The chief looked questioningly for further enlightenment.

"An hour ago," continued Farley, "our man Dodd went over to the Marine Exchange Bank to see the president about a reissue of bank notes, and he had to wait for him a full twenty minutes while the banker was 'in conference.' These financiers have no more respect for government officers than they have for bucket-shop sharks. Dodd decided to put in the time beside the receiving teller's window; he knows him slightly. While they two were talking, a depositor came in with a roll of bills and checks. Dodd wasn't much interested, but as the man pushed the deposit through the cage, he noticed one of the new hundred-dollar Fillmore certificates. Something out of the ordinary struck Dodd about this one, and after the deposit had been made, he got the teller to give him a look.

He brought the note to me. We compared it with one of ours. It's counterfeit, chief."

Boyle, with the two specimens, went to a window. Through a magnifying glass he compared the certificates.

"If this note is bad," Boyle gruffly declared, "then, with all due respect to the government engravers, the counterfeit's a better job than the genuine article. When did you put them out?"

"Three days ago." Farley wet his dry lips.

"When'd you get the plates from the engraver?"

"At eleven twenty a. m. on Saturday, the thirtieth of December last. They were brought direct to me by the messenger and were looked at by the people in my office, then at once put into the safe before closing time."

"Who were those people?"

"Mr. Dodd, Mr. Lemmell and Miss Greene, my stenographer; but they are all trusted and absolutely above suspicion."

"Oh, sure! What I want to know is how the plates were put in the safe. Miss Greene take them there?"

"Not at all. It's not her place to do it. Dodd and Lemmell went with them. Both men insisted they deposited the plates, as I directed, in the front of the main compartment. They then, in each other's presence, closed the safe, of which I had just changed the combination. According to rule, I next separately gave each man his half of the new combination."

"I see. On December 30th, you say. Then there were two days when the bureau was shut up. Could a copy of the plates in any way have been made here?"

"Impossible!"

"How about the engraver?"

"He made only the one perfect set, as usual, and destroyed all the false starts in the presence of the regular witnesses."

"Then there's only one answer. The plates must have been removed in some way and copied. Are you really sure of Lemmell and Dodd? Mightn't they have pieced the combination together?"

"They dislike each other. Lemmell has worked for the bureau over twenty years and feels that

Dodd is an upstart. Dodd's been in government service since he was fourteen years old—started as a senate page—and, though he's been with us only six months, he's got a splendid record. On his side, he calls Lemmell an old fogy and fussy and says he ought to be replaced by a younger man."

One by one, the two men and then Cecilia Greene, and even the stolid guard to the vault, were summoned and interrogated. The last answered the veiled questions that were put to him in an open-eyed wonder and frankness that at once slew suspicion. Each of the others satisfactorily accounted for his time between the hour of closing on December 30th and that of resumption of work of January 2d. Lemmell had spent his holiday in bed with a cold that he hoped to cure before the reopening of the bureau. Dodd took his young wife and baby to Atlantic City, catching the first train after noon by running and then having to run from the return express back to his work. Miss Greene went to a matinée on the Saturday afternoon.

"A gentleman from our boarding house took

me," said she dryly, and she looked at Farley; here was her way of telling him that she was unmarried entirely from choice.

From the theater she had gone to her married sister's at Alexandria, where she "tended the children" until Tuesday morning. This sister, it appeared, was then in hospital, and all possible help was needed at home with the babies.

"That will do," said Boyle, dismissing her. He directed his next words to Farley. "We can tab up on all their statements, but I think they've told us the truth."

Farley made certain that the door was fastened before he answered. "Chief, there is only one man who knew the whole combination of that safe and could have removed the plates. That man is myself. I think it is my duty to offer my resignation to the secretary of the treasury."

The bell of the desk telephone interrupted him.

"Hello!" said Farley into it, and then to his visitor: "It's for you, chief."

In his turn, Boyle put the receiver to one ear and listened for a moment. Presently he said to

Farley: "It's headquarters talking—Hoagland, my right-hand man there. He's got something from a company that makes paper for you. The concern's been taking stock of their warehouses; they've just discovered the loss of three large rolls."

There was a tense moment in which the two men looked in amazement at each other. Then Boyle shook an advising finger in Farley's gray face.

"Stop printing," said he.

CHAPTER XXII

COUNTERFEIT

"SO that's that," said Hoagland.

"But it's not all?" asked Dan Stone.

Hoagland shook his head. There was one scene more.

The mills of the gods grind slowly, but the mills of government are a close second. It was April 3rd in Washington before the affair of the Fillmore certificates came to the personal attention of the secretary of the treasury.

The secretary, who had not before, even in writing, had the case in its entirety presented to him, listened with concentration while first Farley and then Boyle rehearsed their parts in the mystery of the lost-and-found plates and of the subsequent appearance of counterfeit money.

The secretary was of the old school. He looked like a deacon, and, as a matter of fact, in his

home town he was one. He was sixty, small and plump, with a genial pink face and effective side whiskers. His first move was to turn to Farley.

"Of course," said he, "your offer of resignation was very honorable, but of course it was—hum—what I might call too conscientious. Besides, it would attract attention—possibly invite questions. We shan't consider it for a moment. Nevertheless" —he picked up and thoughtfully examined a single pencil astray in the ordered emptiness of his desk— "nevertheless, you must understand that this is a most unfortunate incident—most unfortunate, in view of certain hopes and projects of the administration." He tapped the pencil on his desk's glass top. There was to be a presidential election in November.

The long and lean Farley had been sitting bolt upright in an office chair. He now bent forward, his thin hands spread flat on his high, thin knees.

"There are less than a hundred of the Fillmore certificates in circulation as yet, Mr. Secretary, and we have stopped all printing. Hadn't we better recall the issue at once?"

"Not at all! Not at all!" Mr. Secretary shook his side whiskers vigorously. "Any such course at the present time would subject the government as a whole and this administration in particular to financial annoyance and political ridicule. Er—yes, that; and of course such a process would flatter criminals and encourage crime. To be sure it would." He turned to Boyle. "Chief," said he, putting all the force he possessed into his utterance, "these false plates must be found! You have got to ferret out the counterfeiters from their holes. You understand? There is no time to lose. Put every one of your men on the job, if you have to. It is essential that success be accomplished with the utmost speed and—er—lack of publicity."

Boyle's red mustache contemplatively rose and fell over a tightly bitten, unlighted cigar.

"We can't do quite that, sir," said he. "We've got a pretty good organization and will win out in the end; but we can't speed up till we've a bit more to go on than we have now. This is an unusual case. These crooks seem to have brains. They've covered up so well, so far, that all we've

got to go on to date is that this doesn't seem to be the work of any men figuring in our phony-money records."

The secretary was about to interrupt, but Boyle indicated that he had not finished.

"Long before counterfeit was even suspected in this affair all possible finger prints on the safe were eradicated, and though we *think* that there was a removal of the plates from the safe, we have no actual knowledge of it. They were simply, according to two persons, placed on one shelf; after a couple of nights they were missed for five minutes by those same persons; and then, according to two other persons, they were found on another shelf. The only thing we've got to work on is the disappearance of a little paper—possibly mislaid or miscounted—and the appearance of counterfeit money on the market."

"Well, that's plenty, chief!" said the now thoroughly irritable secretary. "Take it *off* the market! Meanwhile, the treasury will be obliged to stand the loss."

"I get you, sir," said Boyle, "and you can rely

on us to do our best." He drew a paper from his pocket. "The oddest thing," he said, "is this: Here is the digest of reports from every bank in the country. That counterfeit note accidentally discovered by Dodd just after it was turned into the Marine Exchange Bank on March 1st, is the only one known to be in existence, and the depositor—a thoroughly reputable department-store owner—can't tell where it came from. The banks report a few of the real notes—say, sixty or seventy. I haven't counted them up, but that's all they do report. It looks now as if the counterfeiters were resting, or had somehow or other been scared off. At any rate, not a single counterfeit Fillmore head seems to have been passed since that first one over a month ago."

"Curious! Curious!" declared the secretary. "Well, Mr. Farley, I believe I'd like to take a look at these two notes and compare them with some of your notes from the presses or with the plates themselves."

"As I reminded you, sir, we stopped printing

a month ago, the moment we discovered counterfeit, and the plates are locked up in the vault. I can send for them." Farley looked at the secretary for possible contradiction. "But here"—and he produced almost tenderly a wrapped note—"is what is perhaps easier for comparison for the layman. It is the certified standard bill struck off on December 30th."

"Ah, so much the better!"

The three men, their heads bent close, examined all three notes under a large magnifying glass—first, the standard note, then the note in legitimate circulation, and then the counterfeit.

Boyle gave a sharp cry. He actually removed the cigar from his mouth and shook it between thumb and forefinger in order to emphasize his words.

"I told you the crooks' job was better than yours, Farley," said he. "Look here, both of you. There's no blur on this scroll work in the upper left-hand corner of your standard note on the reverse side. Nor is that flaw in this thing which

you call the false note. It appears only on what you call the *good* notes, of which, by casual count, I estimated there are between sixty and seventy reported by the banks."

"Well?" asked the secretary, puzzled.

"Well?" echoed Farley, with dawning suspicion.

"Can't you *see?*" the chief shouted. "Can't you see that Dodd's discovery was the biggest sort of accident? Why, what he reported as bad is actually good, and there's nothing now in circulation *but* counterfeit!"

"That's the way the chief put the case to me," said Hoagland, concluding his rapid chronicle to Stone, "the way he put it to me when I'd come in to report on the trailing of the paper to New York and our blue-nosed friend Goldthwaite's *Hawk.*" He winked solemnly to his superfluous physician. "So I took a sea trip, and you saved my life, and, remembering how one good turn deserves another, I handed you over to these merry gunmen."

"Oh, well," said Dan, "you thought you had to get in here, and that was one way. It seemed a bit strenuous to me, that's all. But the question now is: What are we going to do here, shut up like this?"

"*We* shut up?" The man on the bed chuckled. "Those guards outside are *your* guards; it was entirely on *your* account that Peña said he'd lock the door. He considers me a friend! Of course, he'd have got you anyhow—and trust him to say so!—but the fact remains that I did turn you over to him."

"You think you can help her?" asked eager Dan.

"Her? Oh, the little lady? Perhaps. Perhaps I can get a chance to help you, too, if nothing happens in the meanwhile to give me away here. Then, once I've got this Ramon fellow copped——"

"But how *can* you get him?"

Hoagland continued: "And speaking of not being given away, it won't do to go flourishing that card about. Suppose you just hand it back to me."

Throughout the narrative, Dan had been thought-

lessly holding Hoagland's leathern credential case. Now, to return it, he extended it to its owner.

"Look out!" whispered Hoagland

For the card did not reach that owner. Preparing for some such surprise as was at this instant carried out, the crafty Peña had lied. The door of the room was not locked.

It swung open, and, with an amazing lightness, Don Ramon bounded in. He flicked the credentials from Dan's unwarned fingers.

"Thanks—thanks, Señor Medico! A cigarette?" His loud, derisive laughter rang to the ceiling. Then he opened the case. The briefest look sufficed him. "Ha! Not cigarettes, after all."

He shot a glance at Dan, whose lips were tight —at Hoagland; but Hoagland, at this intrusion, had sunk back upon the pillows, and there, as the ill-starred Tucker had once done before him, was simulating unconsciousness. The huge planter drew back a pace.

"So this is your little game, is it?" he purred at Dan. "Fernando was right, then. He is always

right. You are a secret-service agent of the United States come to spy upon my poor house, Señor so-called Medico!"

He spread his fat hands wide and moved back the fraction of a step farther.

CHAPTER XXIII

UNDER THE HOOFS

"STAY there! I will myself kill this fellow!" Villeta flung the words over one massive shoulder to the guard in the hall, kicked the door shut, and then, with the added force of momentum, rushed upon Dan.

It was the charge of a rhinoceros. Falling before it, Dan was caught and enveloped in a mighty grasp that crushed him against Don Ramon's broad breast, while one of the hands that had torn the jungle serpent's head from its body gripped both of Stone's wrists and bent his arms straight backward from the shoulders. Victim and attacker struck against the bed.

Then the invalid Hoagland suffered a sudden convulsion. The sheet that partially covered him sailed four-square into space; it rode the air of battle and, descending, enmeshed both the combatants. A third combatant hurtled after it; the patient threw himself upon Villeta's shoulders.

But Ramon's weight had deceived the detective. Both here and in Sanchez it had seemed to Hoagland to be nothing more than the flabby fat of the heavy eater. Now he was to discover that underneath this soft outer layer worked, unretarded, muscles like the muscles of a crossroads blacksmith.

Try as he would, strain as he did, the secret-service operative, himself no weakling and always in trim, could not rend the planter's titanic hold from the nearly snapping arms of Dan. Had it not been for the confusion of the suffocating sheet, from which both Stone and Villeta struggled to free themselves, Don Ramon would not have let go at all; but the entangling folds of linen choked him, and, as Hoagland guessed this advantage, the secret-service man decided to use it to the utmost capacity. He pulled the sheet tighter about the tossing head of the taller of the two concealed men.

Ramon, half gagged and half smothered, could not call out, and, in order to breathe adequately, he must loose his hold on Dan. He fought the alternative bitterly, but at last let go and dropped to his

knees. He pushed his great body first to the right and then far to the left, knocking over both his assailants. Fuming and sweating, he sprang upright and twisted the sheet into a ball, which he tossed to the bed.

After all, he had been too quick for Hoagland. The alteration of position was a thing accomplished in the merest flash of time. Before the two Americans could realize the speed with which his maneuver was enacted, they were being dragged by the backs of their necks toward the hall, the door of which was reopened in answer to a kick from Don Ramon's heavy riding boots. With a contemptuous snort at the dazed guard, his master bellowed for better help in the removal of his prisoners.

"Socorro! Socorro!"

His bawl echoed through the *palacio.* From the floor below, running footsteps sounded. They sounded nearer. They were ascending the narrow stairs. The sentry at the door, whose noninterference had once been commanded, showed signs of convalescing intelligence. Villeta, Dan, and Hoagland were just around the turn of the door when

Dan, falling forward, managed to grasp one of his captor's ankles. Don Ramon was caught in mid-stride; he tumbled with a resounding bump.

Heavy men are hard to throw, but, if they are thrown, it is heavily. For one instant Villeta lay so still that the sentry's whole mind was given to him, and during that broken moment, the Americans scrambled to their feet and stared at each other. To run forward now would be to run into that on-coming help which was clamberng up the stairs. Dan, quicker in this crisis than Hoagland, dragged at the latter's sleeve and pointed within the room.

When Don Ramon had last kicked that door, its key dropped from the lock; it lay now a yard beyond the sill. Dan pulled the detective to it. They slammed the door just as a recovered Villeta flung himself against the barrier. Pressing with all their strength upon their side of the oaken panel, they managed to hold until Dan had turned the key. It was a strong key set in a strong lock. Once, perhaps, it had secured other prisoners in that room. The present prisoners were thankful for its temporary protection.

Hoagland produced a pair of automatics and put one into Dan's hands.

"I oughtn't to have given myself away," he muttered; "but I thought that dago was going to kill you, my friend." He pointed to the proffered weapon. "I didn't want you to have this down there in the jungle," he said with the vacant stare that Dan had noted on the *Hawk*. "But—oh, boy—I want you to have it now!"

"Why didn't you—didn't you use it—on *him?*" Stone panted. He nodded toward the door and indicated the invisible but more than audible planter who was hammering at its farther side.

"The first rule of our service," Hoagland smilingly explained, "is never to shoot while there's any chance without it." Villeta's blows redoubled; the treasury agent grew serious again. "And now," he concluded, "I think you and I are getting to the last chance."

Again and again Ramon pounded on the door; more and more steps thumped up the stairs and came nearer and nearer along the hall. Villeta cursed the guard, then roared incisive orders. He

called for guns, machetes, for all his adherents, and for Fernando—above all, for Fernando.

Over the turmoil the hunchback's shrill voice sounded finally in answer, from far below. "At once, Don Ramon! At once!"

Dan drew Hoagland to the window. "You're right," said he. "Look!" And he pointed meaningly straight down the precipitous outer wall. "We can't make it that way; never in the world! And we can't escape by the door—and the door can't hold forever. We're trapped. It's only a question of time!"

The secret-service man, one eye on the reverberating portal, tapped Dan's shoulder:

"A question of time; that's just it. We must hold out as long as we can. But even then——"

A roar and a smash interrupted him. Don Ramon's peons had arrived in force. Their machetes hacked at the door; their pistols shot through it.

"A minute or two—not more. Listen to that!" Dan spoke between the noise of the blows. "And, if they can't work fast enough this way, they'll rig up some sort of battering-ram."

The wood was already splintering. Through the thinnest of the paneling the flash of a peon's evil blade gleamed among the splinters.

After that there was no more talking against the pandemonium. Hoagland gestured to Dan to stand close to the doorpost on one side. He posted himself on the other. He released the safety catch of his own weapon and held it cocked for the tumultuous moment of the enemy's entrance. Dan sedulously and resolutely imitated his companion's grim prepartions.

Crash! The wood seemed breaking at all points, and yet somehow the door as a whole still held firm. Hoagland lifted his left arm and examined the watch that he wore upon his wrist.

"We must keep them back as long as we can!" he shouted; but, through the din of the battering, the younger man was forced to guess at what he said.

Then came the end. With a rending lunge the door fell inward and, after it, pell-mell, pitched the vanguard of the dark attackers.

The first two dropped at the first two shots from

either side of the doorway; but what followed was wholly indiscriminate. Instantly the room was full of men and gray smoke, pierced by the dull red of explosions. Don Ramon climbed over a pair of bodies and, seeing Hoagland first, hurled himself at the secret-service operative, seizing his wrist and trying to wrench his opponent's pistol free. A couple of other men shouldered after him and fell on Dan, who shot one, but missed the other; he did not greatly care so long as Villeta and Peña remained alive to threaten Gertruda—and Peña had not yet so much as appeared.

The doorway was narrow. The attackers, crowding hard and without order, had to come in only three at a time. An ugly fellow with lopped ears postured at the threshold and flourished his machete. Hoagland saw him and, raising his wrist despite the pressure Don Ramon had on it, fired; one earhole became a slash of blood; the man howled and fell, and so held back for a moment those behind him.

Thus matters stood when from outside the room, outside the house itself, a sound that was new beat

through the noise of assault—the galloping of horses. There rose a shriek below stairs, which Dan knew must be Fernando's. Peña, perhaps delaying to rally all the peons, had inexplicably not yet come up in answer to his master's command!

Ramon, amid the turmoil of the fight, stood at pause and listened.

"I knew they wouldn't be a minute late!" Hoagland's shout broke the second's lull. "It's the constabulary.

To all save three of the crowd those English words meant nothing, but to Dan and Don Ramon they came, though so differently, as the magic words that break a spell. Suddenly no longer restrained, Stone burst free with a yell of triumph and battered his way toward the door, his sole thought the rescue of Gertruda.

Villeta's eyes started as if they would roll from his head. He backed rapidly, cursed a peon who was trying to aid, and, roaring "*Vaya!*" he flung the living obstacle aside, kicked his way over the blockade of bodies, and dashed from the room and down the staircase.

By now Dan also had vanished. The leaderless peons stopped, turned, and stared after Villeta, open-mouthed. Then, with a babel of cries and a savage disregard of their dead and wounded, they fled in their master's wake and followed him down the stairs.

Hoagland had rushed to the window. He had been right. The patio was full of armed men, and more were galloping up—helmeted natives, officered by Americans. He threw his arms high over his head and addressed the universe:

"Didn't I tell you it was only a question of time!"

Then horror trod upon the heels of exultation. He shuddered.

For down in the patio an ugly thing happened. Having scented trouble ahead of his master, and not wishing to share it, the hunchback had all too tardily attempted an escape. Unsightly as he was, he had—as Don Ramon had told Stone in the course of his extenuation of the hunchback's actions—a wife in the neighborhood of the village, and, wicked as he had abundantly proved himself to all the rest

of the world, her, in his crooked way, Peña loved. He understood the significance of the approaching hoofs; he guessed flight imperative, but without this woman he would not try it. He might have cut across to the farther side of the plantation and made alone for the Haitian interior; instead, he thought to slip between the raiders and secure his wife before any escape proper could be begun. Terror, however, poisons acumen. Fernando, in his panic, miscalculated the distance of the charging constabularly.

As he reached the patio's edge, the first four horses galoped in. Their hoofs just missed his diminutive figure. He ducked this way and that. He swerved; he slipped. He fell to his knees. The next four animals crushed his shrieking form in the dust of the avenue.

CHAPTER XXIV

FLAME

"DAN, dear, but I assure you," said the Señorita Gertruda; "and you can yourself see my feet, that they have not been cut off. I can walk perfectly."

He had found her in her own room, after wildly searching a dozen others, deserted by the appointed guards who had run off in answer to Don Ramon's summons of assistance. Having once lifted her in his arms, he was now carrying her through the door that, from the ground-floor hall, opened to the patio.

"I don't care," said Dan. "I don't want ever to let you go."

"Only," she persisted, "I have not been at all harmed, I assure you!"

"And you never shall be, thank God!"

"Because doubtless," the girl laughed, "these officers and men here will aid you to defend me."

This took his eyes from her, and he realized that he was now facing a crowded compound in which stood not a few of his uniformed fellow countrymen. She blushed as he put her down; he blushed, too, as an officer of the constabulary came up to them.

"Mr. Hoagland asked me to tell you, sir, that the house is now safely surrounded. Most of the peons are already in custody."

"You—you're really American?" stammered Dan. "United States American?"

"Oh, altogether, sir!"

"In Santo Domingo?"

The questioned man frowned slightly. "I'm afraid," he said, "that you're like most of the people back home. Hardly any of them know that United States citizens have been officering the constabulary just about ever since Mr. Roosevelt took over the customs for us."

He was right. Dan was like most Americans. He contritely admitted having heard of the historic change and then forthwith forgetting it. He recollected that Don Ramon had, for the most part, care-

fully kept him to the back streets of both San Lorenzo and Sanchez. Of course he had seen no sign of the new order.

"And Hoagland sent for you?"

"Yesterday—a wireless to Puerto Plata—from the only wireless station within twenty miles of here."

Dan sniffed at the still air. There was the scent of something burning.

"Where's he now—Hoagland?"

"He's looking for the owner of this hacienda. What is his name? Villeta? It seems the fellow came down the main stairs, but he never showed up here, so he must have got out back, or else he's gone up again by some other way."

Dan shouted. "Why, good heavens, he's in the chapel, of course!"

The officer smiled. Was this interlocutor crazy? "Saying his prayers?" he asked.

"No, no! You don't understand, and I hadn't time to tell Hoagland that part of it. I only told him I knew what their game was." Dan all but forgot Gertruda. He seized the officer's shoulders.

"Why, it's all there in the chapel, the presses, the fake money and——"

A sweating Hoagland rushed up to them. Something of what Stone said he had caught; in his turn, he began to shake Dan. "Where's the chapel? Where *is* the chapel?"

Dan surrendered the señorita to the officer's care and, followed by the secret-service agent and a score of men, led the way at a run. As they advanced, the scent of things burning grew more pungent.

"He's burning up the money!" cried Stone.

"I don't give a whoop about the money!" panted Hoagland. "What I've got to get is the plates. In a counterfeiting case, as long as the plates exist——"

His breath nearly stopped, and his words stopped altogether. Dan, running well ahead, remembered that, during his visit to the chapel, he had not once thought about the plates.

The heavy door was unlocked. Whoever was inside had wasted no time in securing it behind his

entrance. Stone tore it open. A cloud of smoke rushed out and on it flapped a squawking bird.

"*Muerte al traidor!*"

Don Ramon, in his extremity, had not forgotten his pet; but now Pedro deserted him for the less stifling atmosphere of the hot afternoon. The parrot flew, still squawking, into the jungle.

The attackers rushed inside. A slow smoke was filling the transept from the rickety confessional box. Originating in the counterfeit hundred-dollar bills, the fire had already spread outward. The woodwork was crackling close to the body of the peon, who was stretched there, staring at the vaulted roof and seeing nothing—the only disinterested figure among them all.

Hoagland tore away a handful of the charring paper and stuffed it into a coat pocket. As he did so, three shots out of an automatic pistol flashed from behind the altar and spattered against the west wall above the raiders' heads.

Dan looked back toward the way by which he had entered.

"The plates!" shrieked Hoagland, divining his

purpose while it was yet but half formed. "Never mind the man! The plates are worth more'n their maker. Why——"

But Stone, with quick decision, zigzagged a path among his new-found allies. He had a score of his own to pay. He ran across the patio and into the now deserted house.

He tore upstairs. He rushed light-footed along a gallery and so came, with quick stealth, upon the balcony over which he had thrown the peon who now lay dead there on the chapel floor.

Dan looked down over the rail. In spite of the rising smoke, he could now see Don Ramon quite clearly. Behind the altar and through its marble tracery, the pseudo-planter was taking careful aim at the constabulary. He had probably made his way to the chapel by a roundabout course after passing through a back door of the *palacio;* he never dreamed of looking up.

From the east end of the balcony it was a long diagonal leap to the shoulders of Villeta below. Dan measured the distance with precision. Could he make it? He climbed upon the rail and poised

there; into his mind flashed the memory of how he had poised before his plunge from the *Hawk*. Below, the eyes of the armed men were raised to him, but Hoagland gestured them to silence, and the embattled counterfeiter—the man who had kept Gertruda from her inheritance—peeped only at those of his enemies who were on his own level.

Balanced as if for a dive into some quiet swimming pool, Dan counted the number of yards and the angle he must cover if he hoped for anything but death or maiming on the chapel pavement. Ramon's huge, forward-bent back presented a clear but perilously far-away landing place, a landing place only just possible of achievement.

Stone made the dive. The wind of his passage whistled in his ears. His heart seemed to stop beating.

But he had not calculated erroneously. Like a missile from a skillful sling, he struck his goal, safely between the sharpshooter's shoulders. The impact was tremendous. Both the human bullet and its human mark rolled, dazed, upon the tiles.

When Dan sat up, the invulnerable giant, Ramon

was surrounded by the raiders and was shrugging his recognition of the fact that the time was overripe for surrender.

"You appear to have captured me," said he to the most zealous of his guardians. "Don't point your revolver like that. It might go off. Never fear, I shall accompany you quietly."

Through the gathering smoke, Hoagland was anxiously examining the machinery in the center aisle while the one group of constabulary who were not busy watching Don Ramon set themselves to putting out the fire.

"Where are the plates?" the secret-service agent again demanded. "I've got to have those counterfeit plates, Mr. Villeta."

Don Ramon only smiled.

The plates were not inside the burning confessional box. That was soon evident. Looking on detachedly at the fevered search, Villeta bit his nails and shook his head as if he were in no position to offer enlightenment.

Hoagland ran up to Don Ramon. He shoved forward an enraged fist.

"Will you tell me where you've hidden those plates? You know we'll have our troubles with a jury unless we find 'em, and you know they're more dangerous at large than *you* are! Where have you hidden them?"

Villeta fairly beamed. "Señor, I have no idea of what it is that you are talking."

"Shall I kill you, or will you tell me?"

Ramon knew that for a bluff, and he displayed his knowledge laughingly. "You shall kill me."

The bluff was fairly called. Hoagland tossed his thin-thatched head and turned away. Throughout Dan's dash to the balcony he had, under the hampered sharpshooter's fruitless fire, ransacked half the chapel. Now the second half had been vainly scoured. Yet the operative was decided that these imperatively important pieces of metal were somewhere under this groined roof.

They must be. All the work had been accomplished here, and the place had been kept more securely locked than the chief counterfeiter's own bedroom could have been.

Hoagland wheeled on Dan. "You're a lot of help, you are!" he vociferated. He had to expend his chagrin on somebody. "You've made a lot of use of your opportunities, I *don't* think. Found out everything that I'd guessed beforehand. Turned up a lot of junk that I didn't half need." One would have thought that he had especially commissioned Dan to come here. "Oh, I wired home for your record and got it all right. Studied medicine and played with church architecture. If you had to play with something, why didn't you pick a thing that could be of some use now?"

It was the old taunt. It was, in effect, the gibe against Dan's father that the Pennsylvania-Dutch lawyer had launched at the boy when the elder Stone's estate was settled: "Your pop was the kindest-hearted man as effer lived, but he hadn't an eye fer money yet. If you want to git along, boy, keep your fingers off'n print."

And it stung his father's son to action. Marvelously, he remembered that single detail of the old books on ecclesiastical architecture which solved

the pressing problem of his government's present quest.

"I've got it!" he said.

Hoagland fairly shook him. "Got what? Where?"

"The plates. Don't! You're hurting my shoulder where Peña bit it! I mean I know where they are. Listen! In every Catholic altar there is a piece of metal or a thin mortared stone—the altar stone—that covers a cavity. They put relics of a saint in it. This chapel's not used now, but the altar stone—that hole—*that* must be here; it's just the place. *Look in it!*"

CHAPTER XXV

THE BUENOS AIRES WOMAN

IN the tonneau of his big limousine—one of the largest in Washington—the usually genial secretary of the treasury displayed a troubled frown, while, so close to his face that the breath of that neighbor's speech rustled his gray side whiskers, he listened to the deductions of the chief of the secret service.

"It's all a process of elimination," said Boyle, chewing his cigar emphatically. "I'm sorry for poor old Farley, and, except by elimination, we can't get a thing on him. But somebody's got to be the goat, or the administration will catch the Old Harry. These fake notes are all over the place. There aren't so many of them, but they're scattered about everywhere, and the rumor's got out about them—only on the inside of course, but *out,* all right—and the plain fact is that there isn't any clew as to how they got there. Well, then, Farley had and has

facilities that nobody else could have, and that's all there is to it!"

The chief was always direct. He believed in going straight to the point, however brutally. So when the pair arrived at their destination and were finally ushered into Farley's private office, he gave that gentleman eye for eye.

Not so the little secretary of the treasury. One sidelong glance showed him the drawn pallor of the suspected man's careworn face and the stoop of his shoulders, which recent worry had forced there. The secretary kept intact the genuine heart of the old-line politician; he kept it firm, but in the right place, and so he now blustered in his fussy manner to cover a regret quite honestly poignant.

"Mr. Farley," he finally began, "the government, as you are well aware, is most disturbed. You've no good news, I fear, in this—er—Fillmore note paper?"

Farley shook his tired head.

Boyle continued to regard the superintendent steadily through his sharp eyes that never wavered.

"The treasury department," said its secretary, "has come to a standstill in the affair. We've—well, we've—well, we've just got to throw up our hands."

"You mean——"

The secretary blew his nose. He had a way of blowing it ostentatiously when he was worried. "Public disgrace threatens us," said he. "That's what it amounts to. Things can't be hushed up indefinitely. Every bank in the country knows, and when things are once known privately, it's never a long time before they are known publicly, too. The coming elections, if I may speak quite openly——"

"Do, please," said Farley. "But I understand what you're driving at." He passed a hand across his eyes and tried to smile. "You mean that—that I must go."

Boyle clapped him on the shoulder. "I'm glad you take it that way!"

But Farley was no fool. He guessed, suddenly, what lay behind the chief detective's masquerade of good-fellowship. To pay the disciplinary penalty for an executive error was one thing, but to be suspected of overt crime was another. Crime—

after his long life of denial, of hard devotion to routine duty—after his record that bore only this single blot! His cheeks turned gray. He looked at Boyle with a quick, puzzled gasp:

"Only—why you can't really think I'm—that I'm *guilty?*"

It was an abrupt climax, but before Boyle could answer, the office door was thrust open. There stood Miss Greene, tight lipped, yet evidently almost bursting with news. Long training made her look only to her employer for permission to speak.

The male trio scowled at her intrusion. Farley's nerves were on edge.

"Well?" he asked sharply.

"There are three men outside, with three plain-clothes men besides. They say—that is, one of them says he must see you at once. It's a Mr. Hoagland——"

"Hoagland!" shouted the chief of the secret service. "Bring him in!"

"What is it?" gasped Farley. He began to mop his brow.

Boyle made a sapient gesture that meant "Wait and see." He had no idea what was coming.

The guards did not enter, but Hoagland, smiling profusely, bustled forward at once, his derby hat in one hand. Behind him followed a sturdy, boyish person with frank eyes and a shock of tow-colored hair, and behind *him*—and quite as if he were glad to accompany them—a broad, big, genial gentleman, carrying a Malacca cane strapped to one wrist, a gentleman immaculately clad in speckless white, whose dark glances flashed from the now incarnadined Miss Greene to the group about the desk, and whose fat hands were lavishly decked with rings.

"Well?" snapped Boyle, who had no intention of betraying any lack of omniscience. "Let's hear what you've got to say, Mr. Hoagland."

Hoagland did not at once directly answer his chief. He had his own pride and his own love for the dramatic. Not to be robbed of their indulgence, he had carefully refrained from telegraphing any news in advance. He pushed forward the younger

of his two companions and addressed the general assemblage.

"This is Doctor Daniel Gurney Stone," said he, "or almost a doctor," he corrected. "He's proved himself of invaluable assistance to us, and *this*"—he pointed to the smiling foreigner—"is Señor Ramon Villeta—according to himself—and he can give you some information about those Fillmore plates."

Don Ramon made a sweeping bow.

Farley leaned forward and looked at the recent planter with puzzled interest.

"I've seen you before, but I can't think——" Then he remembered.

Boyle was entirely what he would have called "practical." Quite as if he had never had the least suspicion of Farley, he now addressed Hoagland. "Have you got the plates?"

"Sure." The agent handed out a carefully wrapped package. "You know what an altar stone is, chief? I traced these to an altar stone."

"Of course you did," said Boyle

But his assertion lost all its potential effectiveness in the common rush to examine that offered package.

There arose a general sigh. Each in his own way, the Washington officials certified the contents of that parcel to be what they had just been pronounced.

The secretary of the treasury cleared his throat. He pulled at his whiskers and opened his mouth. He was patently glad, however, that Hoagland postponed for him the immediate necessity to apologize to Farley.

"Remember Tucker?" Hoagland inquired of Boyle. "Skinny, lanky guy—government engraver with a chronic grouch?"

The head of the secret service nodded noncommitally. It was Farley who gave eager assent, and to him, as the more appreciative, Hoagland then addressed himself:

"Extra disgruntled. He resigned about six months ago. I've a hunch my friend, Señor Villeta, had something to do with it. Well, as the chief here knows, I'd had Lawson and Sweeney and myself following paper, mostly around Brooklyn wharves, and that's how I struck the lead. The counterfeiters' mistake was in wanting to overdo the thing, like that Pennsylvania case, where the fel-

lows got away with their bills, but were caught by their cigar stamps. This gang ran short of paper and sent up for more."

"Yes—yes," said Farley. "And you followed that clew?"

"Went to Santo Domingo with the fresh supply, and there I found this Tucker had been making hay while the sun shone on Señor Villeta's ranch—or while it didn't! Night work, you know. I ran into a lively mess, I can tell you, but Doc Stone helped me out. Still, that's a long story, and Tucker's dead now——"

"And so you got these plates?"

"Yep, and cabled our consul to have the captain and mate of the ship the gang used held for further orders at Port of Spain, where I knew they had condensed milk to deliver. Then I came back. It was a side partner of Tucker's shipped the paper; I gathered him in as I came through N'York this morning, but he doesn't know much, so I left him locked up downtown, here in Washington, and——"

"Did you get any of their product?"

"The phony money?" Hoagland's face fell. "Just

this." He produced a few charred bills. "All the rest was burned up in the chapel where they stored it. Money to burn Villeta had—and he burned it, all right!"

Then, for the first time during this interview, Dan Stone spoke. Out of a trousers pocket, he pulled his ten bills.

"I've got this, sir. I was paid it for—well, for semiprofessional medical services."

He placed his thousand dollars on the desk. Boyle, however, had succeeded in securing attention by turning upon the Santo Domingan.

"I came across you just nine years ago, my friend," he was saying; he had the good detective's memory for faces. "It was a little matter of opium smuggling then, but we couldn't get the goods on you. We suspected your wife, too. Where's she now?"

Don Ramon shrugged lightly. "My new wife, you mean, the wife I married two—three years ago —yes? Oh, she is in no way concerned in the present enterprise. She is living in Buenos Aires."

There came a loud gasp from the door. Every

one stared thither. Miss Cecilia Greene, whose continued attendance had been overlooked by Villeta, crouched there in a state closely verging on collapse. Nevertheless, even as they all stared, she was pulling her statuesque frame together and already pointing a finger at the foreigner.

"You—you——" she exclaimed.

On her invitation, Mr. Farley had once, it will be recalled, dined at his stenographer's boarding house. In those days he considered it good business to be on terms of personal acquaintance with his office force; and in those days he regarded this one of its members rather as a fellow government clerk than as a woman. Now he colored slightly as he dutifully inquired:

"Miss Greene, isn't this Señor Villeta a gentleman who used to live where you do?"

She covered her face with those pathetic hands for ten years so efficient in the bureau's service.

"I—I thought that he and I were going to get married!" she blurted. "He made love so—so wonderfully! Oh, I'm *so* sorry, Mr. Farley!"

Farley bowed his head. "Go on," said he.

"Well, then, I'd refused a lot of other men, because I thought you were going to promote me, and at last it was plain you wouldn't." She lowered her hands and raised her eyes to Farley's with sudden defiance, but as quickly looked away. "When I found I was mistaken, I—I—I guess I was a fool. Anyhow, that's why I borrowed them for him."

All but two of the men regarded the handsome penitent with a mixture of bewilderment and compassion.

"Explain yourself!" Boyle ordered.

Quick to attempt to retrieve his error, Don Ramon turned to her. "But, my dear Miss Cecilia, I am assuredly going to marry you!"

He was too late.

"You—you beast!" she cried. She triumphed. "What about the wife in Buenos Aires?"

She gave him a wholly withering scorn. Boyle had stepped over to her. He grasped her arm as in a vise.

"How did you do it?" he bellowed in her ear.

"Don't hold me like that!" She shook him off. "And don't yell. It's rude."

"Well?" he demanded, but he let go his hold and lowered his voice.

"Mr. Farley," said Miss Greene, ignoring the secret-service chief and, for some occult reason, facing Dan as the least unsympathetic man in view, "Mr. Farley had made up the fresh combination of the safe on December 30th. I knew he would—I've not been here for years for nothing!—and I believed Don Ramon—I mean, this creature—when he said he just wanted a glimpse at them."

"At what?" asked Boyle. "The plates?"

"Of course, silly! Because he said he was going to be head of the Santo Domingan treasury department and wanted some ideas about plate making, only America was sort of in control of the island and wouldn't let him do anything. Oh," she broke off, "I know I was a fool to believe him, and I knew then it was dreadfully wicked, but I thought Mr. Farley——"

That one interrupted. He still spoke as a man determined to perform a painful duty:

"I remember," he explained to the company, "that Miss Greene was—er—very much annoyed about not getting Dodd's position. Nevertheless, I must add that I did not speak the combination aloud, and no one—not even she—saw the paper on which I wrote it."

The stenographer looked at him with sad eyes, but she went on: "Not exactly, Mr. Farley; only, when you worked it out, you did write it down in ink and you blotted the paper on your desk blotter. I was watching and I know. While you were out of the room giving Mr. Dodd and Mr. Lemmell their halves of it, I read the blotted numbers by simply copying them exactly on a sheet of tracing paper and holding that to the light. When we were closing up, I brought some unnecessary papers into the vault, straight past Jenkins, the guard. Oh, I often had to do that, and he never looked *into* the room—why should he?—he always looked *out*—that was the way any burglar had to come from! Well, I just opened the safe quickly, stuffed the unnecessary papers under my dress, so he'd see they were gone if he had sense enough to think about them at all—

and stuffed the plates there, too, of course—and then I went directly to the ladies' dressing room."

"And then?" It was Boyle who spoke now. He waved down Farley's hand that was raised in protest against harshness. "And then?"

She glared at him. "In there I pinned on my hat and powdered my nose, but first I wrapped the plates in oilcloth." She pointed to Ramon. "He'd provided it."

"Where did you hide them?"

"Where he told me to; in the box up top that holds the water."

"But," protested Farley, still loyal to his system, "every employee is searched on leaving!"

"Yes, sir. Only that was a day before a holiday. I was searched as usual. I said I'd forgotten my bag—must have left it in the dressing room—which I'd done, too, on purpose—so I ran up and stuffed the plates again under my dress and just ran back and opened my bag for the inspector to show him nothing was in it that shouldn't be. He was in as much of a hurry as I was. Then—then

I went to the matinée and gave this—this Don Ramon the plates!"

"And what did you do next?" Boyle kept the inquisitorial preëminence that he had acquired with so much difficulty.

"Why, next," pursued Miss Greene, now only too ready to convict both herself and her false admirer, "next, he gave them back, the way he'd promised to, on the Tuesday morning when I stopped at the boarding house after being at my sister's in Alexandria. I'd been near crazy all the time they were gone, Mr. Farley. And he"—the memory was almost too much for her—"he thanked me and said I'd helped a poor, oppressed government and wouldn't ever have cause to regret it."

She paused only to dab her eyes with a crumpled handkerchief. She launched defiance at her quondam lover.

"And so," she continued, "after the plates were missed on Tuesday morning—we weren't searched when we came *in,* you know—I reached over your head, Mr. Farley, as if *I* was looking for them, too, and put them on the wrong shelf and found

them there. Nobody'd ever suspect *me,*" she said bitterly to Boyle; "but I guess this—this beast copied them while he had them. Only, I give you my word, I never dreamed he'd lied—not till months afterward." She turned on the fat Lothario. "You're a crook," she said to Don Ramon, "a *crook!* And I want you to know that, since I found you out, I've—I've become engaged to an honest man—I've become engaged to Mr. Farley."

The very room gasped its surprise. Everybody turned to the superintendent.

"Ahem!" coughed the thus announced fiancé.

"Eh?" asked the secretary of the treasury.

"It's quite true," admitted Farley, with a sudden blushing recrudescence of youth. "Of course, I didn't know till now——"

"Will it make any difference between us?" demanded Cecilia Greene. There was a certain largeness about her gesture, though her eyes were moist. "because if it does, you're free."

She was really very handsome, and she had been at last undeniably truthful. Farley looked at her.

"It won't," said he, and then challenged criticism from everybody.

None was forthcoming. Boyle had walked back to the desk and was examining the plates that his agent had brought.

"Villeta," said he, "we've got to hand it to you for one thing. These are just about flawless. I congratulate you on being the most expert counterfeiter the service has ever come across."

Don Ramon, now that Farley's stenographer had done her worst against him, was his best self once more. He bowed a deprecating acknowledgment to Boyle. Then, with an inclination of apology to Miss Greene, he calmly usurped her place in the limelight. He coughed softly behind a fat hand with outspread, ringed fingers, and, having thus secured the desired attention, said:

"Gentlemen, I am about to denounce the guilty man—and to prove—*prove*—that I am not he, that he is a member of the cabinet of the President of your United States."

CHAPTER XXVI

GUILTY UNCLE SAM

PROBABLY not since the denunciation of Aaron Burr had such a charge been made in Washington. Villeta was not mad; he patently knew the full weight of his words, and yet he as patently enjoyed them. Uninvited, he sat down. He crossed his plump legs, tapped one of them with his Malacca cane, and beamed on his gaping audience.

Boyle swore. In a paroxysm of stupefaction, Hoagland grinned frozenly. For Farley this new surprise was one too many; he sought Cecilia's support, while Dan joined the others in looking from the cheerful face of Don Ramon to the dumfounded countenance of the secretary and back again. Since nobody else appeared able to speak, the Domingan embraced the opportunity that he had created.

"As you gentlemen will shortly discover," said he, "this affair—at least as far as I am concerned—is all but concluded. Therefore, I may speak as I

always prefer to speak—frankly. I do not conceal from you that it was my hope—if the initial venture succeeded and if, of course"—he inclined his great head to the gasping Cecilia—"and if, of course, my suit for this fair lady's hand was favored—to borrow, as time passed, other plates by means of her good will and efficient services. Nevertheless, Señor Secret Service Chief, my inherent honesty compels me to confess that I do not completely deserve your praise——"

His auditors were gradually emerging from their paralysis. Hoagland, recovering an instant before his immediate superior, seized the opportunity thus provided.

"Cut it out! Cut out the society stuff!" he interrupted. "Chief," said he to Boyle, "this guy never had one lone good quality except that he was decent to Pedro—and Pedro was a bird."

Boyle decided upon nonchalance. He sought to cover wide wonder with a narrow smile. "Well, why shouldn't Señor Villeta be good to a bird? He's some bird himself!"

Don Ramon was not, however, to be distracted by

persiflage. He went on: "I was saying, Señor Chief, that I do not completely deserve your generous encomium, and this is why. Attend now: Except for one bill here that—then without my knowledge—Señor Tucker had given to a temporarily embarrassed señor engaged by a house of paper makers—of bank-note paper makers, to be exact—I have not yet put one of my notes upon the market."

"What?" At least three voices shouted the unbelieving query.

"But no," softly laughed Villeta, extending an open palm. "You must understand, my dear sirs, that when one what you call 'unloads' in such affairs as this, the unloading must be all at once, before governmental alarm is taken. Myself, I wished to print an even two million dollars before I started to sell my wares. I was consistent, and save for the few charred fragments that Señor Hoagland has brought here, and that one unfortunately given the paper maker, the only existing copies of notes I have printed are now on that desk there. I paid them to this señor doctor to quiet him and because I hoped him soon to disappear."

Don Ramon paused. He raised a dramatic arm.

"Gentlemen," he smilingly declared, "you have grievously wronged me. It is not *I* who have been the counterfeit. *I* used real paper and real plates—*your* paper and the plates that *you* had made. And you never thought to examine what you found, at last, in your own possession!"

There followed a silence scarcely less surprised than its predecessor. Don Ramon was radiant. Dan could not quite suppress a merely nervous chuckle, but everybody else was solemnly astounded. Then Farley pressed a finger to the bell designed to summon his senior assistant—and forgot to remove the pressure.

"Bring me," said he, as Lemmell put his fussy little head into the crowded room, "the Fillmore hundred-dollar-note plates—and the standard note along with them."

"Oh, you will see!" Don Ramon bit his ragged nails while they waited; but he ceased on Lemmell's return and began to rub his hands again in premonitory satisfaction.

Then, as he watched his contention indubitably verified, he shot his full bolt.

"The plates that were half innocently substituted by my poor, dear Miss Cecilia Greene here——"

"I *hate* you!" cried Cecilia. "And I wouldn't knowingly have got Mr. Farley in any trouble for *anything!*"

Farley daringly reached over and patted her supple shoulders.

"Were," continued the unruffled Villeta, "not those which she had given to me. Not at all. What I gave her and what she then gave you were my own counterfeit plates, carefully but quickly copied from the originals—while those originals were in my possession—by your Señor Josiah Tucker, God rest his soul! Señor Secretary of the Treasury, you have been flooding your own country with bogus money!"

They came running toward him—all of them—their mouths agape. But he did not budge.

"And," he serenely concluded, "unless you wish to expose your own foolishness by publishing this confession, you will find no charge on which you can legally hold me."

He had the whip hand. It was Hoagland that struck it down.

"Well, *I* charge you," said he, "with the murder of two of your own servants—two of your peons—fellows that you caught investigating your hacienda's chapel. Stone tells me they died before I got there—these two—but once you're locked up, we'll find some of your people willing enough to talk, and if I've learned anything about Santo Domingo"—he looked at Boyle, who nodded a wise assent—"the courts down there, where of course you'll be tried, won't stand for the introduction of any impertinent evidence about matters up here in Washington."

The effect of that speech on the great criminal and the high government officials that it more or less directly involved was manifold. Quite ten minutes had elapsed before so unimportant a person as Daniel Gurney Stone, M. D.-minus, had a chance to act in repercussion to its effect on him. Then he managed, after several failures, to drag Hoagland privately into a corner.

"Look here," he whispered. "As far as I can make things out, the secretary's letting everybody,

except old Ramon, down easy, because there's an election due and he doesn't want publicity. He's even going to turn free that good-looking stenographer so she can marry her boss, and he'll probably give her a wedding present, by the looks of him. Why, he's promised me enough out of his own pocket to—well, he's whispered that I may keep the thousand Villeta paid me and apply it to my medical tuition fees. But what I want to ask you is this: You sounded a little while ago as if you knew something about Santo Domingan law. Can you inform me as to a good lawyer in San Domingo City, or Puerto Plata, who'll get back my fiancée's estate for her?"

THE END.

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